

DETECTIVE NOVELS

OCT.

MAGAZINE

10¢

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

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AND STAMPS
FOR VICTORY!



GEMS OF *DISASTER*

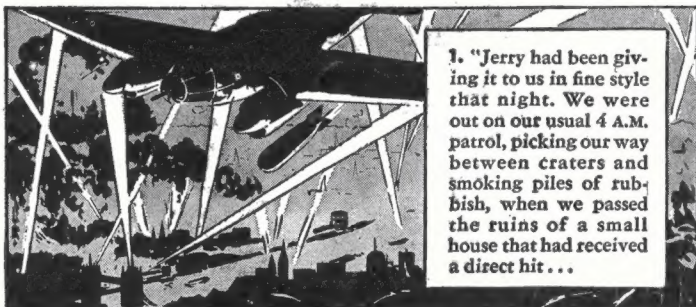
*A Candid
Camera Kid Novel*
By JOHN L. BENTON

LAST TRAIN TO FREEDOM
An Exciting Mystery Novel
By NORMAN A. DANIELS

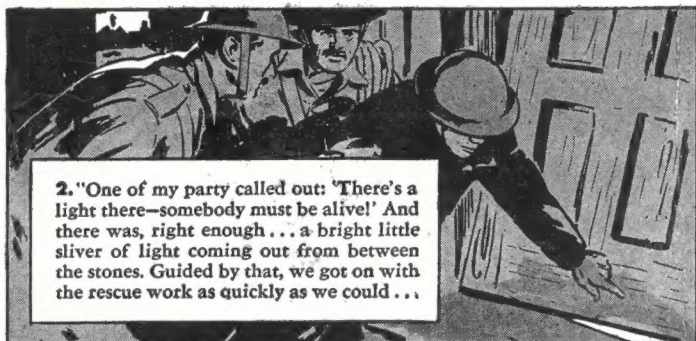
LONDON'S "MIDGET MARSHAL" TELLS BOMBING THRILLER!



This true story of the blitz was told to a war correspondent by Michael Davies, Chief Shelter Marshal, London Area. Mr. Davies is famous as the smallest Air Marshal in England; his height is 3 ft. 6 in. Mr. Davies was a practicing optometrist before the war, was active in organizing youth camps, is now in charge of one of the largest air shelters in England. The shelter extends 4 acres and includes 4 miles of underground corridors. Complete with interior radio communications and sixty-five large sleeping bays, it can normally house 10,000 people—in a pinch, 14,000. Over one and a half million bricks were used to build the blast wall.



1. "Jerry had been giving it to us in fine style that night. We were out on our usual 4 A.M. patrol, picking our way between craters and smoking piles of rubbish, when we passed the ruins of a small house that had received a direct hit..."



2. "One of my party called out: 'There's a light there—somebody must be alive!' And there was, right enough... a bright little sliver of light coming out from between the stones. Guided by that, we got on with the rescue work as quickly as we could..."



3. "...and found our man, half dead from injuries and bomb shock, his hand still gripping his flashlight like a vise. Seems he'd grabbed his flashlight to show others to the basement when the bomb fell. And that—plus having fresh batteries—was what saved his own life!"

PLEASE NOTE: Don't blame your dealer if he's out of "Eveready" flashlight batteries. The Armed Forces are taking enormous quantities, and the war industries with the highest priority ratings are taking the rest.

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DETECTIVE NOVELS MAGAZINE

Vol XII, No. 2

EVERY STORY BRAND NEW

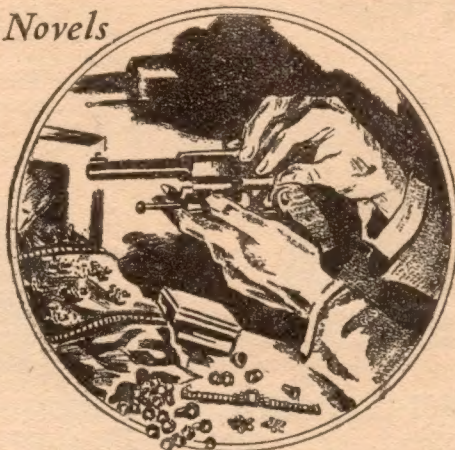
October, 1943

Two Complete Full-Length Novels

GEMS OF DISASTER

By JOHN L. BENTON

When fabulously valuable jewelry turns to paste, blood-stains vanish and murder looks like suicide, Jerry Wade hops right into the middle of a steaming potpourri of sinister crime! 15



LAST TRAIN TO FREEDOM

By NORMAN A. DANIELS

Jack Spencer, American consular agent, discovers that there are wheels within wheels in the Nazi spy mind when he undertakes the guardianship of a repatriated group bound for an exchange vessel 54

Thrilling Short Stories

TREACHERY TRAIL

Louis Falk 46

Bill Marshall fights to save the girl he loves from plotters

I'LL TALK ABOUT YOU

Sam Merwin, Jr. 81

A radio news commentator tells the world he knows a killer

AND

THE BULLETIN BOARD

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A WAR BOND MESSAGE

David Manners 53

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Established 23 Years

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I Trained These Men



\$200 a Month in Own Business

"For several years I have been in business for myself making around \$200 a month. Business has steadily increased. I have N.R.I. to thank for my start in this field."
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Lieutenant in Signal Corps

"I cannot divulge any information as to my type of work, but I can say that N.R.I. training is certainly coming in mighty handy these days." (Name and address omitted for military reasons.)



\$5 to \$10 a Week in Spare Time

"I am engaged in spare time Radio work. I average from \$5 to \$10 a week. I often wished that I had enrolled sooner sure does come in handy."
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MAIL the Coupon for a FREE Lesson from my Radio Course. It shows how N.R.I. trains you for Radio at home in spare time. And with this Sample Lesson I'll send my 64-page illustrated book, "Win Rich Rewards in Radio." It describes many fascinating jobs Radio offers, tells how you can train for them at home in spare time.

More Radio Technicians and Operators Now Make \$50 a Week Than Ever Before

There's a big shortage of capable Radio Technicians and Operators because so many have joined the Army and Navy. Fixing Radios pays better now than for years. With new Radios out of production, fixing old sets, which were formerly traded in, adds greatly to the normal number of servicing jobs.

Broadcasting Stations, Aviation and Police Radio, Ship Radio and other communications branches are scrambling for Operators and Technicians to replace men who are leaving. You may never see a time again when it will be so easy to get started in this fascinating field. The Government too needs hundreds of competent civilian and enlisted Radio men and women. Radio factories, now working on government orders for radio equipment, employ trained men. And think of the NEW jobs Television, Frequency Modulation, Electronics and other Radio developments will open after the war! This is the sort of opportunity you shouldn't pass up.

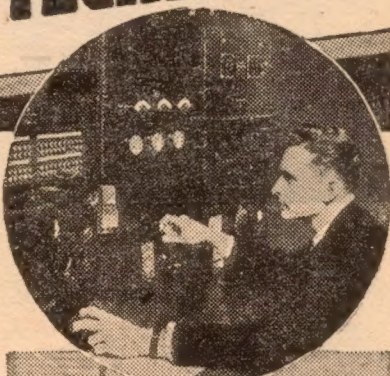
Many Beginners Soon Make \$5, \$10 a Week Extra in Spare Time

There's probably an opportunity right in your neighborhood to make money in spare time fixing Radios. I'll give you the training that has started hundreds of N.R.I. students making \$5, \$10 a week extra within a few months after enrolling. The N.R.I. Course isn't something just prepared to take advantage of the present market for technical books and courses. It has been tried, tested, developed, perfected during the 23 years we have been teaching Radio.

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MAIL COUPON NOW for FREE Sample Lesson and 64-page illustrated book. You'll see the many fascinating jobs Radio offers and how YOU can train at home. If you want to jump your pay—mail Coupon at once in an envelope or paste on a penny postal.—J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 3K09, National Radio Institute, Washington 9, D. C.

TRAINING MEN FOR VITAL RADIO JOBS



BROADCASTING STATIONS (top illustration) employ Radio Technicians as operators, installation, maintenance men and in other fascinating, steady, well-paying technical jobs. FIXING RADIO SETS (bottom illustration), a booming field today, PAYS many Radio Technicians \$50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make \$5 to \$10 a week extra fixing Radios in spare time.

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Now!**

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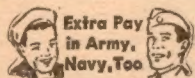
MR. J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 3K09
NATIONAL RADIO INSTITUTE, Washington 9, D. C.
Mail me FREE, without obligation, Sample Lesson and 64-page book, "Win Rich Rewards in Radio." (No salesman will call. Write plainly.)

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"I am happy to tell you that for four weeks I have been on the air over our local radio station. So thanks to your institution for such a wonderful course."

• W. H. S., Alabama.



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"I've always wanted to play the piano accordion," writes *H. E. from Canada. "But thought I'd never learn it. Then I read about your lessons. I don't know how to express my satisfaction."

* Actual pupils' names on request. Pictures by Professional Models.

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Surprise your friends! Learn to play the piano or other musical instruments this quick, easy way. First lesson starts you playing real tune.

YOU'VE often been asked that question: "Do you play?" Everybody looks at you expectantly, waiting for you to sit down at the piano and entertain the crowd. Are you compelled to embarrass yourself and throw cold water on the party by saying "No"?

What a difference it would make if you could say "Yes". Think of the good times and popularity in store if you could only play the piano or some other musical instrument—the guitar, violin, accordion, saxophone or whichever one happens to be your favorite.

Well, you CAN. You can learn to play any musical instrument you please. You can do it by a method that's **EASIER AND QUICKER** than you perhaps ever thought possible. It takes only a few minutes a day at home, at your own convenience. You save the expense of a private teacher, so the cost is trifling.

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Get Bursting Strength Quickly

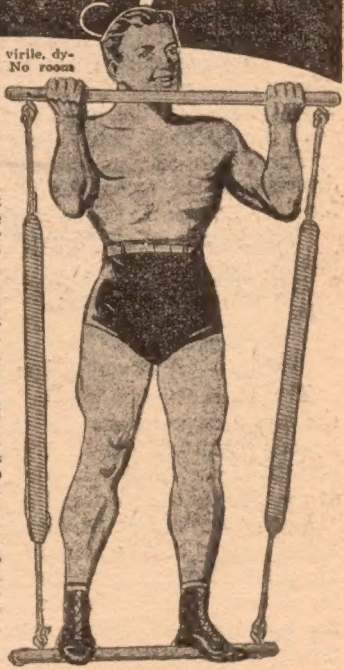
If you are a weakling or boast of super muscles, you will find this outfit just what you need. Contains dozens of individual features, all adjustable in tension, resistance, and strength. This permits you to regulate your workouts to meet actual resistance of your strength and to increase power progressively as you build mighty muscles. Men who have reached the top in strong-man feats acclaim this progressive chest pull and bar bell combination. It contains a new kind of progressive chest pull. Not rubber which wears out but strong tension springs. These springs are adjustable so that you may use low strength until you get stronger and terrific pulling resistance when you are muscular. Included is a specially invented bar bell hook-up. This bar bell outfit permits you to do all kinds of bar bell workouts... to practice weight lifting and bring into play muscles of your legs, chest, arms so you build

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The BULLETIN BOARD



THE boy was no more than ten or eleven years old. He was little and thin and his face was alive with terror. His small jaw was swollen and discolored, there was an ugly bruise on his forehead.

He was dressed in a man's ragged coat which hung on him like a sack, and man's trousers whose cuffs were rolled up into a shapeless mass. He shuffled along the road, trying to keep on his feet the huge shoes which threatened to flop off with every step.

A car hummed down the road. The boy raised his thumb in a familiar gesture.

There were four men in the car. One, a huge flabby blimp of a man, whose eyes were drowned in the fat of his face, rolled back his lips in a grin that was more of a snarl.

"There he is, the little rat," he said. "Fix him!"

"I'll fix him, all right, Kraus," said the driver.

A Brutal Crime

The car shot forward. As it came close to the boy it swerved sharply. It hit him with a terrible impact. The boy's body was tossed into the air. It came down on a pile of brush at the side of the road and did not stir.

Brakes squealed as the car came to a halt. Kraus got out and lumbered back to the boy. He put his hand over the lad's heart and felt for a beat. Then, as he prepared to pick up the body, a shrill hail from a farmer in a nearby field startled him. Dropping the boy, he rushed back to the car.

"Let's get away from here," he said. "The kid's dead as a door nail."

But Kraus was wrong. The boy had a skull fracture and a lot of other injuries, but he wasn't dead. Picked up by the farmer and rushed to a hospital he was operated upon at once and a determined fight begun to save his life.

Enter—The Crimson Mask

The nurse's aide who was assigned to the case was Sandra Grey, and that's how Bob Clarke, The Crimson Mask, first heard of the boy.

Sandra came down to the hospital lab

where Clarke was working, gratis, as part of his contribution to the war effort. Something was bothering Sandra.

She told Clarke about the boy, about the terrible beating he had taken before he had been deliberately run down by the car. And now, after the operation, he had lost his memory and could tell them nothing about himself.

He could only remember that he had been kept a prisoner somewhere, that "they" had hurt him; and that there were mice that squealed, millions of mice. And somewhere an orchestra had played Schubert's "Serenade."

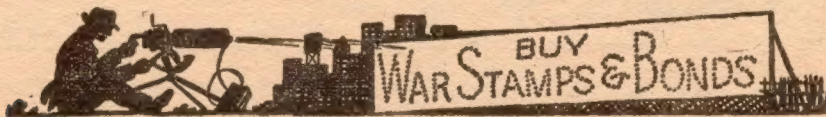
Sinister Memories

Gradually, Clarke realized that this was no ordinary case of a runaway boy. There was something sinister and frightening in these little bits of memory dredged from a murky background of terror.

So Bob Clarke disappeared and the Crimson Mask took up the trail. Who was the boy, where had he been held, by whom and why? Those were the questions that needed answers. And with hardly a shred of a clue to start with, this was truly a case for the Crimson Mask!

FIVE CLUES TO MURDER is the name of this latest thrilling Crimson Mask novel, by Frank Johnson, featured in our next issue. You'll follow Bob Clarke as he patiently un-

(Continued on page 12)



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CITY.....STATE.....



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Drinking water is scarce in North Africa. And what there is, is likely to be bad.

So before our soldiers landed there, they were weaned away from water. A dash of iodine in their drinking water served the double purpose of disinfecting it, and making it taste awful. By the time the boys landed in Africa, they'd lost all taste for water.

The favorite prepared drink is lemonade. Field Ration K provides it—along with veal, pork, sausage, coffee, bouillon, malted milk tablets, biscuits, chocolate and chewing gum—all in a 33-ounce pack.

Sounds like somebody was taking pretty

good care of our boys, doesn't it? And that's right. American soldiers are the best-fed, best-equipped, best-cared-for in the world.

But keeping them that way takes money. So much money that Uncle Sam asks us to invest not 10% or 15% or 20%, *but all we can in War Bonds.*

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Remember, you get back \$4 for every \$3 you invest, when Bonds are held to maturity. But your money is needed *NOW!*

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THE BULLETIN BOARD

(Continued from page 8)

winds, one by one, the gossamer threads which stretch towards the brutal kidnappers.

Frank Johnson has turned out one of the slickest pieces of detective work for the *Crimson Mask* and his faithful aides, Sandra Grey and Dave Small, to work their talents on. It'll keep you on the edge of your chair!

Another Exciting Novel

Also in the November issue is *KNIFE IN MY BACK*, a spine-curdling murder novel by Sam Merwin, Jr., well known to readers of *DETECTIVE NOVELS MAGAZINE*. Mr. Merwin has turned out another of his superb characterizations of people caught in a web of greed of their own making.

It all began when Christopher Horton was told he was going to live after all. For Horton it was an anti-climax. He had been prepared for death—at twenty-eight. Calmly the doctor told him it was a minor medical miracle, but his heart was all right after all.

Horton walked out dazed. He could think of no suitable celebration. So he went out and bought a rare and valuable pair of French glass paper-weights for his fiancée, just to let off steam. That was how he met Rhoda Dumont and her mad grandmother.

The old lady was quite harmless. She merely thought she was the Empress Eugenie and that Horton was Bismarck-Bohlen, nephew of the iron Chancellor of Germany. Horton's supposed "illustrious uncle," she was convinced, was plotting her death and she showed her contempt for the Bismarcks by spitting violently on the carpet, too close to Horton's feet for comfort.

Yet she gave him an invaluable pair of the sulphide paper-weights, for which he secretly slipped the beautiful Rhoda Dumont his check on the way out.

He went back home in a daze, seeing the girl's face before him, in flagrant faithlessness to Julie, his fiancée. He walked into the downstairs living room to find his lawyer's secretary, a glamorous redhead, waiting for him. But she was unable to tell him why she was there. She was lying face down on the rug, with a knife between her shoulder blades.

Many Mysterious Angles

This was bad enough. Still worse were the suspicions that Horton's own brother Joe had been having an affair with the redhead. But Horton could find no reason why she had

been killed, or why the murderer should have picked the Horton living room.

Nor did there seem any connection between this murder and the *sulphides* he had just bought for Julie. Yet that night, after he had given the gift, Rhoda Dumont arrived to ask for them back. The old grandmother had given Horton the wrong pair, she said. Julie showed her claws then and refused to turn them over, nastily. And that night both Julie's apartment and the Horton home were burglarized and the intruder got the *sulphides* and passed out a large bump on the head to Horton.

Chris Horton knew who the burglar was. But when he went to confront that man with the knowledge he was too late. The unfortunate intruder had just had his brains scrambled by a blunt and heavy weapon.

You'd better take it from there. The plot gets thicker and scarier. All I need say is that I think *KNIFE IN MY BACK* is the best novel yet written by Sam Merwin, Jr. You'll find it tops in thrilling entertainment.

Our Letter Box

An interesting long letter comes this month from a reader in Florida who is an old-time police reporter and photographer. I wish space permitted us to reprint this letter in full, but skipping the nice things he says about our magazine (just to show you how modest we are) I think he makes a couple of critical points which you detective story fans will find useful. He writes:

Among the things that spoil a good detective yarn are the following, which I sometimes find in your magazine as well as in others:

Using a silencer on a revolver or repeating rifle—an

(Concluded on page 97)

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THRILLING DETECTIVE
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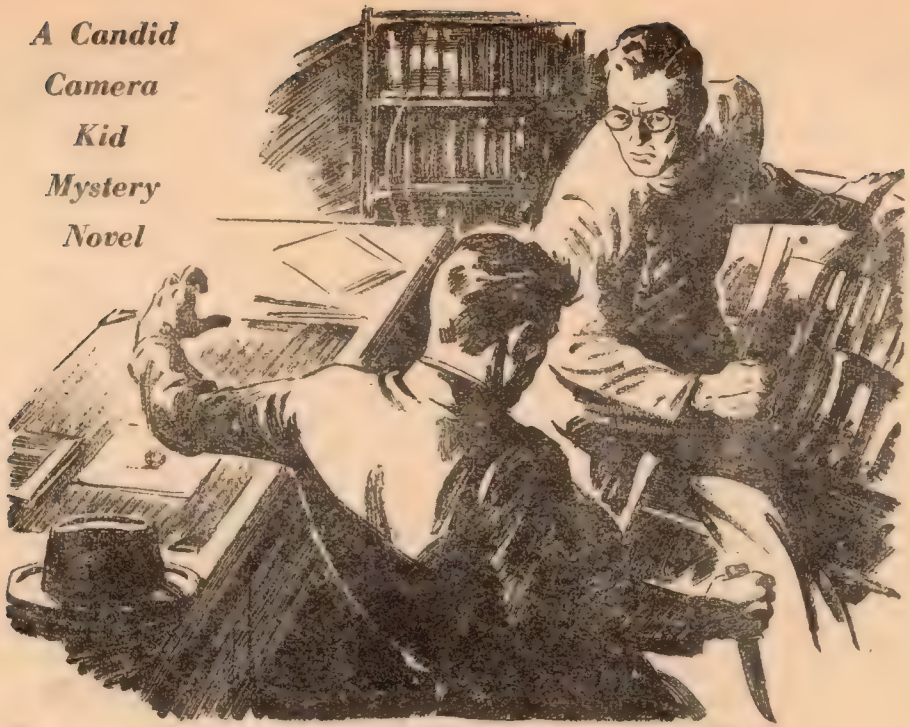
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*A Candid
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Jerry's attack was so sudden that the killer had no time to use the knife

Gems of Disaster

By JOHN L. BENTON

When fabulously valuable jewelry turns to paste, bloodstains vanish and murder looks like suicide, Jerry Wade hops right into the middle of a steaming potpourri of sinister crime!

CHAPTER I HURRIED CALLER

CHRISTINE STUART, pert, blond, and amazingly pretty young newspaper woman, wrinkled her attractive nose as she looked around the restaurant with distaste.

"What a joint!" she said.

Across the table from her sat Jerry Wade, her constant companion, a red-headed young photographer whose work had brought him such success that now whenever he was mentioned, it was by the name he had well-earned for himself—the Candid Camera Kid.

Jerry chuckled, and looked around. The restaurant was an Italian place and reeked of strong Parmesan cheese and red wine. The tables were small, and covered with checked cloths that were none too virginal, bearing reminders that others before the present customers had been served on them. Waiters bustled around in such haste that the place had the general air of an eat-and-run cafeteria.

"What's wrong with the joint, as you call it?" Jerry demanded, as he expertly used his fork and tablespoon to wind a massive amount of spaghetti into the proper shape for eating. "We have been

The Candid Camera Kid and Christine Stuart

coming here to eat for a long time."

"I know." Christine shook her head. "But it's—well, it's common, Jerry. There is so much confusion and noise. The kind of place I like, where I can really enjoy my food, is one where we would have soft music, dim lights, and deft waiters."

"Excoosa me."

A swarthy waiter passed a hairy hand one-tenth of an inch from Christine's nose and seized her water glass. Holding it close to the rim he poured water into it. Some slopped overside, but that didn't bother him. More spilled as he plunked it back on the table.

Christine's brows went up as she glanced across at Jerry.

"See what I mean?" she asked, and hurried on before he could answer: "Jerry, we can't keep on eating in such joints as this. Not forever."

JERRY laid down his fork and spoon, reached across the table and took one of her hands.

"Sure, Chris," he said. "I know. But things haven't quite worked out the way we want them to yet, so that we can be married. That takes a lot of dough, and many things we'll need we just can't get right now, because of priorities and such."

"I don't mean that, Jerry. Not exactly." Christine's eyes grew starry. "It would be wonderful, though, if we could be married. But what I'm referring to now is our present life. We shouldn't be satisfied to be with the sort of people we run into here. We should mingle with a better class. Newspapermen are all right, but they do lack finesse and class."

Jerry smiled crookedly. "Okay, darling," he said. "I guess I get you. What's on your mind? Unburden yourself."

"Well," Christine said thoughtfully, "I have a splendid chance to meet the sort of people I'm talking about—people who count. I think you ought to meet them, too, so I want you to come with me. Right after dinner I have an appointment with Mrs. MacDonald Wonacott—you must know of her, Jerry, be-

cause you *do* have to know who is Social Register and who is not. I'm to begin a series of articles for the *Graphic* about jewelry. The most valuable and unique jewelry in the world. Mrs. Wonacott has her share of it in this town, and she has graciously consented to give me an interview to show me her gem collection and tell me its history."

"Yeah—I'll bet," Jerry said shortly. Like most newspapermen or photographers who get around a lot, he had no illusions about many things, including the socially great; most especially the socially great, in fact. "'Graciously,' my eye," he said, his lips twisting wryly. "She probably fell all over herself trying to get into your first article. People like that are all publicity nuts, especially the women. I—" He stopped short, and a broad grin spread over his cheery countenance. "Oh, oh, I'm beginning to see the light!"

"Yes, Jerry?" Christine said sweetly. "Are you? That's fine. I hoped you would come along. Social contacts like that may help us some time."

"Uh-huh," Jerry said, with studied deliberateness. "But I have a hunch you're not so much interested in my making social contacts as you are in my making pics of Mrs. MacDonald What's-her-name's rocks. Nope—not me."

"Oh, Jerry!" Christine said pleadingly. "It's a wonderful chance, and I do need the pics. The whole assignment—covering everybody who owns worthwhile jewelry—won't take long. Just ten, or perhaps fifteen nights. I've got lots of people to see, but I can hurry it."

Jerry dropped his spoon and fork.

"You mean I've got to sit around and gas with those monkeys? For fifteen consecutive nights—just so I can take shots of their gimcracks? Well, not to-night anyhow, darling. I've got garlic on my breath."

Chris dug into her purse and handed over a small tin box.

"I knew you'd try that as an excuse," she declared. "If I can stand the garlic, so can Mrs. MacDonald Wonacott. Anyway, here are some tablets guaranteed to—to take your breath away."

Accept the Challenge of a Scheming Killer!

Jerry closed his eyes and gave a deep sigh of resignation. He could not get out of this and he knew it. In the first place, even if he didn't love Chris so much that he was glad to be her abject slave, there was still another consideration where she was concerned. He owed her such a lot.

EVER since he had first set foot in New York she had been his guid-

All that had been at first. Their feelings about each other now were distinctly different, for that first interest which had instinctively drawn them to each other had soon ripened into love. Now they were all in all to each other. And they did want to get married—they meant to, as soon as possible. But as Jerry had pointed out, the cards were against them right now, for neither of them wanted to enter the state of matri-



JERRY WADE

ing star and mentor. When he had first arrived—a green kid from the country, with a passion for photography and twenty-six dollars and eighteen cents—he had met her in the *Graphic* office where she was a feature writer. She had at once become interested in him because of his earnestness and enthusiasm.

Under her teachings he had soon become city-wise, had landed a good job because of his persistence and the following of her advice, and now had become one of the best known newspaper photographers in the country.

mony until they could afford the sort of home for which both of them longed.

In the meantime, they were both working toward that desirable end, and both were meeting with success in their chosen fields—Chris, as feature writer and interviewer on the *Graphic*, Jerry in his photographer's berth on the staff of a famous syndicate. He had earned personal fame, also, especially for his pictures of crime and criminals. For almost from the start of his "Candid Camera Kid" career he had developed a knack for helping the police.

Jerry himself insisted that it was his candid camera that did the trick. For which Jerry did not give himself sufficient credit—as the police did. They knew that not only was it his “art” that worked seeming miracles sometimes in crime solutions, but that his keen deductions and a courage that would face any odds had made him a natural-born detective.

His camera, however, was invaluable as an aid. For through some wrinkle in photography he often was able to obtain clues that otherwise might have been overlooked in exposing killers.

He liked it all. Action and danger, the thrill of hunting down someone who deserved to be behind bars—that appealed to his sense of justice.

He was up against something different now—this thing Chris wanted him to do, and he supposed he would have to. To him, jewelry was something crooks stole. If these rocks Chris was talking about had been stolen, he would have cheerfully taken all the pictures of the gems that he could. But this—this helping to build up society queens—he would be ‘way out of his element.

Yet he knew well enough he was beaten from the start. When Chris wanted something, she got it.

“Oh, doggone,” Jerry groaned. “I don’t mind mixing with those people, even if they’re sure to treat me like a doormat. It’s the job itself I’m worried about. Taking shots of jewelry and having the things look like something is one of the hardest things in photography. Suppose I take a pic of a fifty-thousand-dollar necklace, and it comes out like a string of fifteen-cent beads you’d buy at Woolworth’s. Oh, boy! Your Mrs. Wonacott would start a civil action for libel, slander and highway robbery.”

“I know that. So it’s sort of a challenge to your art, Jerry.” Chris looked at her watch. “We have half an hour before the appointment.” She smiled at him sweetly. “Thanks for wanting to help me. I appreciate it.”

“Half an hour?” Jerry cried. “Do you think all I’ve got to do is aim my camera and click it? These things need lighting effects, a dressed-up background—”

“Put some of those tablets in your mouth,” Christine said peremptorily, “and come on. You can argue all the

way to Mrs. Wonacott’s house.”

Jerry got up. “Okay, okay. I said I was coming, didn’t I? But I’ll have to call the office and have ‘em send young Brody over with lights. You and your assignments! Some day I’ll make you come with me and cover one of my specialties. A study of bodies in the morgue. Wouldn’t that make a feature?”

“Be your age,” Chris said, and settled the argument.

THEY took a cab to the ultra-ultra section where Mrs. Wonacott lived and breathed and did her social reigning. Before they reached the porch, young Mike Brody popped out of another cab and got himself tangled up in a lot of light cords and reflectors.

He gaped at the ostentatious house.

“Gee whiz!” he said. “Just like in the movies. How many people got killed, Jerry?”

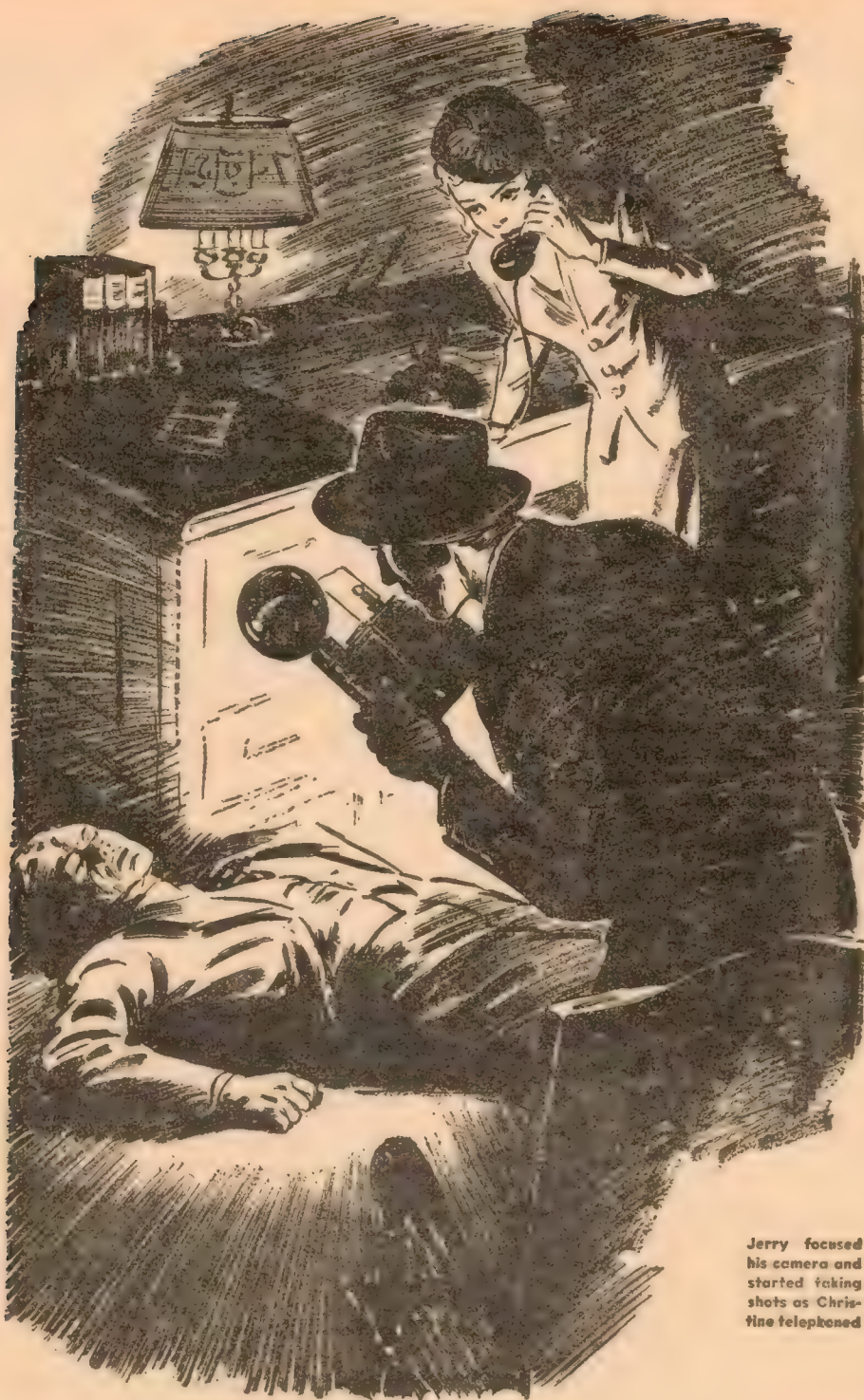
“See?” Chris said to Jerry, her eyes twinkling. “Every time you call for help, they assume it’s just another murder. This time, Mike, we’re going to be nice people. We’re going to interview the lady who lives here and you will help Jerry take pictures of a fortune in diamonds and rubies and things. Forget all about being a newspaperman. Be a gentleman instead.”

“Yah-h-h!” Mike Brody commented.

A butler admitted them into the reception hall, eyed the cluster of lights with a critical eye, and for a moment Jerry hoped they would be heaved out. But there was no such luck. Jerry knew that when a woman swept into the hallway. “Swept” was the word because she was generously built and wore an extremely long housecoat that cleaned the floor as she moved. She smiled at them patronizingly and extended one hand to Chris. A diamond sparkled on it with enough light to make a jewel thief consider retiring on the pension it would provide.

“I’m so glad you could come, Miss Stuart!” the woman who must be Mrs. Wonacott enthused. “It’s delightful to have the very best feature writer for the very best newspaper honor me by making my little collection of gems the basis for the first article of a series I am sure will be of intense interest.”

“Thank you,” Chris said. “This is Jerry Wade, Mrs. Wonacott. He’s a



Jerry focused his camera and started taking shots as Christine telephoned

crack photographer for the biggest syndicate in the business. I'm sure his work will properly present your jewelry. This other young man is Michael Brody. He will assist Mr. Wade."

"How do you do," Mrs. Wonacott said, and beamed on young Brody.

Mike grinned back.

"I do okay, lady," he assured her brightly. "Say, by the looks of this joier—this house you don't do so bad either... Ow!"

The "Ow" was caused when pointed feminine shoes delivered him a neat little kick in the shins.

Mrs. Wonacott did not see that, however. She had turned, and was leading them into the library. She opened a wall safe and took out a stack of jewelry boxes. She piled these like books against her ample chest and dumped the whole business onto a divan.

"You will probably visit Mrs. Brice for your next article," she said to Christine. "She has a few trinkets, also. Some of them are almost as good as mine. That's natural, for of course we both

million dollars' worth of baubles here.

Jerry glanced as the butler stepped into the room.

"Mr. Samuel Cass is here, Madame," he announced.

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Wonacott brightly. "Show him in. I'm sure you people won't mind Mr. Cass, and he'll probably interest you also. He's a very good friend of Willoughby who made the settings of these gems for me."

Jerry shook hands with a tall, slim man who entered. He had iron-gray hair, an erect carriage, and frank eyes. Jerry liked Sam Cass the moment their hands met.

"So this is Jerry Wade," Cass said. "Mrs. Wonacott, did you know that Mr. Wade is one of the best newspaper photographers in the business? Why, his stories and pictures have made history. What's up?"

Jerry answered him, because Mrs. Wonacott had turned aside and was talking volubly to Christine.

"I'm taking publicity shots of these jewels," he explained, and pointed to the

Next Issue: FIVE CLUES TO MURDER, by Frank Johnson

patronize the same jeweler. John Willoughby. You have heard of him, I presume?"

"We have," Jerry Wade said. "As I imagine everyone has who is interested in fine jewels. He's a master craftsman and makes up a lot of special stuff for his best clients. Good man, Mrs. Wonacott. Can I set up your stuff now?"

"Stuff?" She lifted her eyebrows slightly, then smiled tolerantly. "Oh, yes. Yes, indeed. You may have the run of the house."

Jerry glanced around at the huge rooms.

"I'll hardly need that," he said with a shrug. "Just the table over there. And have you a white satin evening gown? It would make a nice background. A black one, too, for contrasting effects."

MRS. WONACOTT rang for her personal maid who brought a heap of shimmering gowns. Jerry selected one, placed it over the table and then started opening the jewelry boxes. He blinked as the gems all but blinded him. Off-hand, he estimated there were half a

scintillating spread of diamonds, emeralds, rubies, gold and platinum. "Tough job, but I'm getting interested. What a lot of War Bonds this stuff could buy!"

Sam Cass grinned, and dropped his voice. "For your benefit, Jerry, Mrs. Wonacott purchased these gems long before there was such thought of our being in a war. Since then, she's been fine about such things. She has her share of bonds, and she rolls bandages with Mrs. Zucci and Mrs. Szysinski at the Red Cross."

"I'm sorry," Jerry said sincerely. "Perhaps I spoke too hastily. Well, I guess I'll go to work. Rig the lights, Mike."

"And I," Sam Cass said, almost too eagerly, "am leaving."

"But you were to spend the evening," Mrs. Wonacott said, as she turned, hearing what Cass said. "I'm disappointed, Sam."

"So am I," he said, "but certain things have come up which I have only just remembered. Got to leave to attend to them. Most urgent. Sorry. Good-night, everyone."

CHAPTER II

FAKE JEWELS—AND MURDER



JERRY said good-night to Sam Cass, and bent over his work. He had selected first a brooch made of diamonds and emeralds in the shape of a tulip. The petals were platinum, the work exquisite. He shifted lights, made a tripod

for his camera consisting of two stacks of books and studied angles.

Suddenly he bent closer, moved the brooch, looked again, and then rapidly placed one after another of the gems under those intensely bright lights. He took a close-up shot of each one. This done, he rolled the film onto the spool, opened his camera and removed the film.

Mrs. Wonacott was telling Chris all about her gems, how she had acquired them and what they meant. But she kept frowning steadily.

"I can't understand why Sam left so abruptly," she broke off to complain. "He was to make a fourth at bridge. Really, I'm quite shocked."

"Brace yourself," Jerry said quietly, "because you're going to get a bigger shock. These gems of yours, Mrs. Wonacott, are beautiful fakes."

Mrs. Wonacott gaped at him. Jerry went on, giving her the news in one big batch.

"Under ordinary lights they would never have showed up. But you can't fool floodlights. Somebody put something over on you and I think it's a matter for the police."

"It can't be!" Mrs. Wonacott got up faster than she had done in twenty years. "John Willoughby made these with his own hands. They have never been out of my possession since. You must be wrong, Mr. Wade. After all, what do you know about gems?"

"Little," Jerry confessed. "But I know lights and angles, and I say those pieces are fakes. They'd probably fool Willoughby himself, but just the same they're not the McCoy. Look—the camera picks up details your eyes can't see. I'll have Mike Brody take these films to the lab and process them. He'll make some blown-up shots and I'll bet even you will agree you have been badly buncoed somewhere along the line."

Jerry handed Mike the roll of film and

gave him precise instructions. Mike, excited now because it was beginning to look as if, after all, there would be a newspaper story with police and all, shoved the film into his pocket and rushed out of the house.

Jerry sat down. "I'm sorry about this, Mrs. Wonacott," he said in a tone of understanding sympathy, "but you are entitled to know the truth. Naturally, we can't suspect a man like John Willoughby of switching jewelry on you. Some time—you'll remember if you think hard—they were out of your possession long enough so that another person could make up these exquisite copies."

"They have never been out of my hands since the day I purchased them," Mrs. Wonacott stoutly declared. "Of course, I keep them in a bank vault. You don't expect me to believe anybody could have got at them there, young man. Not for one moment have they left my hands, otherwise. Never!"

"Not even for appraisal?" Jerry asked.

"Well—no. Mr. Willoughby insisted that I have them appraised, of course. He makes the same demands of any client. I took them to Ivan Karpova, the Russian expert. He examined them right in front of me. I'm sure—"

SHE broke off short, looking startled as, outside the house someone screamed shrilly. There was a dull thump and more screams. Jerry made a dive for his camera and was inserting a fresh cartridge as he rushed to the door. On the porch he joined the butler who stood stockstill, watching people hurrying over toward a figure sprawled out in the road.

"Tragic!" the butler said. "I saw it all, too. The young man looked up and down quite carefully, but a car without lights swerved almost as if the driver wanted to kill him. I am most sympathetic, Mr. Wade."

"Sympathetic?" Jerry gasped. "I don't quite understand."

"The boy you see out there—the accident victim—is the one who accompanied you here. I let him out of the house just a moment ago, and had not yet closed the door when—when it happened."

Jerry muttered a savage imprecation,

rushed down the steps and into the road. A radio car pulled up and one of the patrolmen moved the gathering crowd back. Jerry stuck his press card in his hat-band, elbowed his way to Mike Brody's side and knelt.

Mike was dead. The lining of his right-hand coat pocket was pulled out. As shocked and grieved as Jerry was, he rapidly searched Mike's body. If this should be a case of deliberate murder—which he was sure it was—the one thing, the only thing he could do for Mike now was to take the first routine steps to discover all it was possible to know promptly.

His search was rewarded right away. The roll of film he had given the boy was missing.

Jerry heard Christine cry out in horror. He arose and went to her side.

"It seems," he said quietly, but his lips were drawn and grim, "that your assignment has turned into a murder fest. I wouldn't mind so much if they—whoever the murderers are—hadn't killed Mike. He was just a kid. I'm going to find the man, or men, who killed him and when I do, so help me, I'll fix his, or their, wagons so they'll be taken to the chair on a stretcher!"

"Jerry," Chris said, "when I came down off the porch, I'm sure I saw this man Sam Cass we just met pull away from the curb well down the street. There was a light—I know I wasn't mistaken."

"He certainly made a point of it to get out of the house fast, for some reason," Jerry commented wryly. "Remember what Mrs. Wonacott said? That he was a close friend of John Willoughby, the jeweler, who made up her pieces?"

"Jerry," Chris said softly, "are you certain her jewelry is fake?"

Jerry's eyes were hard as he pointed at the limp body of Mike Brody.

"There is your answer, Chris," he said. "Somebody didn't want those pictures developed. Didn't want proof of the substitution to come out. Whoever killed Mike with that car had an ally waiting nearby to steal the roll of film from him. It's gone! His pocket is turned inside-out."

"Jerry, what are we going to do?" asked Christine. "We must do something, since you're the one who discovered the fake, for Mrs. Wonacott's

jewels were worth hundreds of thousands of dollars!"

Jerry took Chris by the arm and piloted her to the sidewalk. He frowned deeply.

"Mrs. Wonacott remarked that some other woman—a society rival of hers, I suppose—also had a lot of diamonds and such," he said. "I think we'd better get in touch with her without delay. What was her name, and do you know where she lives?"

"Yes—of course. She's Mrs. Brice. She lives half a dozen blocks from here. Do you think her gems might be phony, too?"

"I don't know yet, but I intend to find out. Why not? Somebody substituted phonies for the real thing with Mrs. Wonacott, and it *may* be mass, instead of isolated theft. Why couldn't the same thing have been done with Mrs. Brice's stuff? We're going to see her, Chris, and then we'll pay a call on John Willoughby who designed and manufactured the stuff. After that, I think Sam Cass should have an opportunity to explain himself. We're in on the ground floor—a few leaps ahead of the police—and we mustn't let any grass grow under our feet. Come on!"

THEY walked rapidly north. Chris clung to Jerry's arm and voiced some doubts about the whole thing.

"But suppose Sam Cass did realize that your pictures and lighting might reveal that the jewels were made of paste?" she protested. "Killing Mike and stealing the roll of film wouldn't make any difference. The gems you think are fake are still in Mrs. Wonacott's possession. You could take a million pictures of them."

"I know, Chris. I don't pretend to offer a guess as to what this is all about, but I do know that Mike is dead—murdered—and there was a specific reason why that was done. I intend to find out what it was. We have three clues—or rather suspects. John Willoughby, who manufactured the stuff. Sam Cass, who was so doggone anxious to get away. And the appraisers who handled the Wonacott gems. A substitution could have been made there easily enough."

Mrs. Brice's house, they discovered, was as big as the Wonacott mansion, and the moment Jerry and Chris were



CHRISTINE STUART

admitted they sensed an air of excitement. A portly woman literally flew from one room to another with only a bare glance at her visitors and apparently no curiosity concerning them or their business with her. Jerry disregarded the butler and followed the woman.

She had a table in one room loaded down with gems and she was examining each one minutely. She looked up at Jerry.

"I don't know who you are," she said abruptly, "but do you know anything about jewelry?"

"A little," Jerry said. "Has Mrs. Wonacott phoned you?"

"Phoned? No—no, not that I heard of. Look at this necklace. It's a seventy-thousand-dollar string of pearls and someone has the nerve to tell me they are false! I . . . Just a moment. Who are you two, anyway? Perhaps you know something about this message I received about my jewels."

"We're reporters," Jerry said, and quickly silenced Mrs. Brice's proposed command to have them thrown out. "I can tell you if those gems are false. Mrs. Wonacott has just discovered hers were made off paste. Or, I might say, I discovered it for her. Have a servant bring

the strongest light that can be found to this table. Find me a mirror. A shaving mirror with a concave side if possible. Hurry, will you?"

Mrs. Brice gasped at the effrontery, but there was something compelling in the Candid Camera Kid's tone and words. She gave a hurried order and her butler soon brought an enlarging mirror. Jerry rigged this up so that it reflected strong light squarely upon the gems. He laid several into position, stepped back and peered at them from all angles.

"Frankly," he said, "you've been gypped. Look—in the strong light. Those diamonds sparkle, but not with the multitude of colors a real stone would show. Those pearls, they are dull and lifeless. Perfect imitations, yes, but they can't stand up under a spot. Even a rigged one like I'm using. Where did you buy this jewelry, Mrs. Brice?"

"From John Willoughby, of course. He makes jewelry for all the best people." She turned an accusing glare on Jerry. "Young man, are you sure about this? It's a terrible accusation to make."

"I'm sure," Jerry replied grimly. "In fact, whoever is responsible for this just resorted to murder to try and hide it. Have these articles ever left your pos-

session? As collateral for a loan—or for repairs? For any reason whatsoever?”

“Never,” she said promptly. “I purchased a good part of my collection just before the war. The only other person who has handled them since I’ve owned them was the appraiser. A Roy Graham who has a jewelry store downtown, examine them for me.”

“A Russian named Ivan Karpova never saw them?” Jerry asked quickly.

“Of course not!” Mrs. Brice said sharply, then looked about a little wildly. “I’d better phone the police. It seems that letter was correct!”

“Letter?” Jerry asked quickly. “What letter?”

MRS. BRICE opened a drawer and extracted a plain, cheap white envelope. It contained a card, handwritten, and by someone who was an expert in script writing. The note was brief. It said:

Look at your jewelry. You have been deceived. It is paste and worth but a small fraction of what you paid for it.

“That came not much more than ten minutes ago,” Mrs. Brice said. “It was placed beneath the door. You will kindly remain here until the police arrive. You have offered me no logical explanation as to why you came and I am sure it was in connection with my jewels. You probably can explain the whole thing, too—you and your blond friend. And you will!”

“Sorry,” Jerry took Chris by the arm. “We can’t wait. Tell the police that our names are Jerry Wade and Christine Stuart. They’ll understand. And keep trying to think if there was any time—even a matter of seconds—when another person could possibly have had access to your jewelry.”

Jerry and Chris paid no attention to the woman’s protests and calmly walked out on Mrs. Brice and her threats. Outside, they walked five blocks before they could find a taxi.

“It looks to me,” Chris panted, as they hurried along, “as if Mr. John Willoughby is going to have a lot of explaining to do. Either he, or the men who appraised the stuff. Personally, I go for Willoughby because two different men appraised the two different batches of gems.”

CHAPTER III

ONE SUSPECT EXONERATED



WHEN Jerry and Chris reached Willoughby’s exclusive store, it was dark. In a nearby drug store on a side street, they found Willoughby’s address in a directory, and also learned from the druggist the name of Willoughby’s manager—Lloyd Hargrave. Jerry jotted down both addresses, then he and Chris returned to their taxi and he gave orders that took them to Willoughby’s home.

There were lights in the house. Jerry paid off the driver and, with Chris at his side, hurried to the porch. He rang the bell and waited. A few moments went by and he rang the bell again. When there was still no answer, he peered through windows and tapped on them, without result.

“Jerry,” Chris said, “do you think—”
“Anything is possible,” Jerry grunted.
“Stand back—we’re going in through a window.”

There were chairs on the porch and Jerry picked up the smallest one he could find. A single blow smashed the glass and it took only a second or two to raise the sash. Jerry clambered through and helped Chris to follow him.

Not a sound could be heard. Jerry investigated some of the downstairs rooms while Chris tried the others. Finally, they went up the wide staircase side by side. Halfway to the top, Jerry brought Chris to a halt. His nostrils were dilating.

“Cordite,” he breathed slowly. “A gun was fired in this house not long ago. Come on.”

They found John Willoughby easily enough. He lay on the floor behind a big desk in an upstairs room that apparently had been his study. The man was dead. A single bullet had smashed through his right temple.

“There’s a phone there on the desk,” Jerry told Chris. “Call Sergeant Orr. Keep back a bit. I’m going to take some pictures.”

Jerry focused his camera, slipped a flash bulb outfit into place and started taking shots. He took them from several angles. One was within a few inches of the dead man’s head. Jerry noticed pow-

der marks around the wound.

"Except for one thing," Jerry said, when he had finished, "I'd swear this man killed himself. The wound is identically placed with those usual for suicides, powder marks show the weapon was held close, but—where's the gun? That makes it murder, of course."

"Sergeant Orr is on his way over," Chris told him. "Jerry, Willoughby wasn't either the type of man to commit suicide or to slip fake gems over on his customers. His reputation was clean and fine, though maybe I did suspect him—for a minute. Certainly it's murder."

Jerry was studying a smear of blood that ran from the edge of the desk, downward along the whole back of it. He frowned and took two pictures of this.

"Let's go downstairs," he said. "Your jewelry publicity assignment has developed angles. Darned serious ones, I'm afraid."

They waited in the living room for Sergeant Orr's arrival. Jerry began walking up and down.

"I don't get it," he muttered. "First of all, those imitation gems were superb. Second, why was Mike killed? Third, we have the mystery of John Willoughby, murder victim, and I've got my doubts about that."

"But why, Jerry?" Chris was puzzled. "The gun was gone."

"Yes, I realize that. But didn't you notice the smear of fresh blood on the edge of the desk? The way I see it, Willoughby sat in the chair at his desk. He fired a shot into his right temple, fell across the desk and stayed there. His head was close to the edge and blood oozed out. Then someone deliberately moved the body and in doing so, smeared more blood on the desk. That someone also must have removed the gun—why, I don't know."

"He could have been standing when he was killed," Chris argued. "He could have fallen so that blood was smeared on the edge of the desk."

"No," Jerry maintained stoutly. "In that case, there would have been marks on his head. Bruises. And suicides only shoot themselves while standing up when they face a mirror. Study your homicide statistics and you'll see I'm right . . . I wonder what's keeping Orr."

SOMEONE walked across the porch. Jerry ran to the door, flung it wide and stared at two men. One was a stranger. The other was Sam Cass!

"Wade!" Cass exclaimed breathlessly. "What in the world are you doing here?"

"Hello, Mr. Cass," Jerry said grimly. "I'm glad you came. Saved me a lot of trouble."

"I don't understand," Cass frowned. "Where is John? Willoughby, I mean?"

"He's upstairs, in his study. Dead!"

Both men gaped for a second, then ran pell-mell up the stairs. Jerry heard Sam Cass give a genuine cry of horror, which was followed by a lusty curse from the other man. Finally, Sam Cass came slowly down the stairs.

"I don't pretend to know what this is all about," he told Jerry, "but I've just lost a sincere friend in John Willoughby. It was murder, of course. No gun about. Perhaps you can explain."

"What about yourself?" Jerry demanded. "This isn't the first murder we have faced tonight—a fact of which you are probably well aware. I lost a friend, too. A boy, just starting life. Willoughby's death was easy compared to his and, Mr. Cass, you were seen driving off right after Mike Brody was killed."

Chris stepped forward. "I saw you pull away from the curb a block down the street from Mrs. Wonacott's house—full five minutes after you left in such a great hurry," she said bravely, accusingly. "Can you explain why you were parked there? Why you drove away right after that boy was run down?"

"So that was it," Cass mused. "I knew some excitement was taking place in front of Mrs. Wonacott's. Yes, I stopped down the street. Some trouble with the choke on my car. It stalled."

"Sit down," Jerry said. "There's no use for us to argue this case. It's a job for the cops and they'll be here in a couple of minutes. Who is your friend, Mr. Cass?"

Cass sat down and seemed to have grown fifteen years older. He covered his eyes with one hand for a moment, as if in silent prayer. Then he blew his nose lustily and took an expensive cigarette case from his pocket. Chris rejected his offer of one. Jerry didn't. Cass lit both cigarettes.

"My friend, as you call him," he said, "is Lloyd Hargrave. He managed Wil-

loughby's jewelry store. Took care of the business end. Willoughby was a designer and manufacturer."

"And your own connection with Willoughby?" Jerry persisted.

"I was—his friend."

"Well," Jerry said, "while you're in such a good answering mood, tell me why you arrived at Mrs. Wonacott's in no particular rush and with the intention of spending the evening there, then breezed out like the house was afire? Mind you, that happened the instant you learned I was getting ready to photograph those jewels. They were fakes, you know."

"Yes," Cass said slowly. "I know. That's why I left so abruptly. I wanted to tell my friend Willoughby."

"Oh, please," Chris put in. "Time enough has elapsed since you left us at Mrs. Wonacott's house and the time you appeared at this house for you to have driven here via White Plains!"

BEFORE Cass could answer that one, cars pulled up in the street outside, and men ran toward the porch. Jerry got up. Chris preceded him to the door. Cass grabbed Jerry's arm and pulled him back.

"Please," he implored, "don't involve me in this mess yet! I'm completely innocent. Yes, I knew those gems were fakes the moment I saw the lights on them. I didn't know whether Willoughby knew anything about it or not, but my only idea was to help him—and I can still help him, even if he is dead. Provided I'm free to do so and by free I mean not behind bars."

Jerry broke Cass' grip and went into the hallway to greet Sergeant Orr of the Homicide Squad. They were old friends and had worked together on many cases, always in perfect accord. Jerry explained as briefly as possible. When he told about the odd anonymous note which Mrs. Brice received, he watched the expression on Cass' face. It didn't alter one bit.

"And what does this guy know about it?" Orr indicated Cass with a jerk of his thumb.

Jerry gave Chris a sharp glance which she understood, and kept silent.

"I don't think he knows very much, Sarge," the Candid Camera Kid said. "He was just a friend of both parties in-

volved, that's all. Better go upstairs. Willoughby's manager is with the body."

"Thanks," Sam Cass whispered in Jerry's ear. "I thought I could size up a gentleman when I saw one."

CHAPTER IV

BURGLARY IN REVERSE



FIFTEEN minutes later, Sergeant Orr came downstairs. Hargrave, manager of the jewelry store, was with him. Hargrave was a middle-aged man, partially bald, and he wore bifocals. His cheeks were pink and smooth-shaven. He was obviously upset.

"All right," Orr told Cass and Hargrave. "You two can go now. I'm satisfied I can find you if necessary. Jerry, suppose we talk this over. You and I and Chris."

Cass and Hargrave departed with evident relief. Jerry went at once into minute details about what had happened since he and Chris and young Brody had first gone to Mrs. Wonacott's home. Orr's frown grew deeper and deeper.

"But why the devil should Mike Brody have been murdered?" he demanded. "After all, you could get as many pictures of those jewels as you wished. Maybe it was just an accident and the film case rolled out of his pocket. I'll have some men hunt for it."

"His pocket was turned inside-out," Jerry sighed. "I know it was a bump-off, Sarge. Conversely, however, I don't think you're right about Willoughby, either. My impression is that he committed suicide."

"But there's no gun!" Orr barked. "A gun doesn't walk off, Kid."

"And a man murdered three feet from a desk, and who falls straight forward, doesn't leave a smear of blood on the desk, either. I think Willoughby heard about the discovery that Mrs. Wonacott's gems were phonies and he killed himself. His head landed on the desk and bled from the right side. Some of the blood ran down the side of the desk, but more stayed on top near the edge. Then somebody who wanted it to look like murder came along, placed the body on the floor, and swiped the gun. Make some paraffin tests of Willoughby's trigger finger and you'll see."

Orr shook his head. "What's the use, Kid? What blood are you talking about, anyway? I didn't see any blood on the desk."

"You need glasses," Jerry snapped. "Come on and I'll show it to you."

"Okay," Orr arose. "I didn't even leave a man in the room nor on the second floor. They mess up things too often and for my money a suicide is a murder until it's proved suicide. I'm practical that way. It gets results."

They climbed the stairs. Chris remained in the living room with the excuse that she had seen enough blood for one night. Jerry reached the closed door of Willoughby's study first and had reached for the knob, when he jerked his head to one side and in a whisper warned Orr to be quiet.

There was someone in that room. Whoever it was, probably hadn't heard the approach of Jerry or Sergeant Orr because the hallways were thickly carpeted. Orr drew a gun, nodded, and got ready. Jerry turned the knob slowly, kicked the door wide and saw a blurry shadow heading for a door leading into another room.

"Don't shoot!" Jerry yelled, and sprinted after the man.

He went into a long dive, knocked over a chair, but got fingers around one ankle of the fleeing man's leg. The man crashed down and Jerry quickly clambered on top of him. He saw the gun in the man's hand starting to come up and Jerry didn't waste time talking. His small, but compact and powerful fist delivered a beautiful uppercut. The intruder relaxed. The gun fell to the floor.

Sergeant Orr turned on the lights and Jerry hoisted their prisoner into a chair.

"Well, for the love of Mike!" Orr

grunted. "That's Thad McCardle—a private dick whose specialty is recovering stolen jewelry for insurance companies."

"Uh-huh." Jerry shook the man hard. "Looks like he's acquired another specialty. How'd he get in here, anyway? I thought the front door was guarded."

ORR went into the other room and Jerry heard him clumping down the steps. When he returned, Orr had a reasonable explanation.

"There's a back entrance that leads right to the second floor. The door is open. McCardle came in that way. I don't trust that squirt, Kid. He never played ball with the cops. His idea was to dicker with crooks, pay them off, and get the stolen stuff back. Just like paying a reward for it and, of course, he got a nice little cut."

"Wha-what happened?" McCardle mumbled, and started to get out of the chair. Jerry pushed him back. "Willoughby! He's dead!"

"Yeah, we know all about that," Jerry grunted. "How come you have the privilege of using the back door to this house, and why did you come here in the first place?"

"Jerry Wade—the Candid Camera Kid," McCardle said between his teeth. "Some day I'll take a poke at you, in payment for what happened here tonight. But right now . . . All right, I'll talk. Mrs. Wonacott phoned her insurance company about half an hour ago and said she'd been gypped. The jewelry Willoughby sold her are fakes, she said. The case was turned over to me at once. So I came here to find out what Willoughby knew about it. I—ah—used to

[Turn page]



visit him quite frequently and I knew how to get in through the back. But if you two monkeys are trying to pin his murder on me, you're nuts!"

"You will be elected soon," Jerry grunted, "if we don't stop running into fresh angles. Watch him, Sarge. I'm going to see about those bloodstains."

Jerry went over to the desk. He had to straddle Willoughby's corpse, but when he studied the edge and sides of the desk, he saw absolutely no signs of blood.

"Well?" Orr called from the other side of the room. "Is it there or isn't it?"

"Gone," Jerry said. "Could have been wiped off easily enough. It was fresh. Search McCardle and see if he's got anything on him that might have been used to wipe the blood off."

"He's clean," Orr reported. "I'm taking him downtown for booking. Any guy who sneaks into a room where a suicide or murder victim is lying on the floor must be up to something. We'll boil him in oil if he won't talk."

"Yah!" McCardle grimaced. "I'll be out of your coop in ten minutes. Don't ever forget, Sergeant, that I'm an important guy. The insurance companies think a lot of me."

"That's more than your mother ever did," Orr snapped. "Come on."

Jerry and Chris taxied back to Mrs. Wonacott's home. They were admitted and Jerry talked to the butler for a moment. From him he drew the information that the car which had deliberately run down and killed Mike Brody looked a great deal like the one Sam Cass drove.

Then Jerry went into the living room and received another shock. Two experts were examining the gems. Mrs. Wonacott had a rather sinister expression on her face.

One expert looked up. "You must be the photographer who stated these gems were not real," he said. "I have examined them and I am satisfied they were genuine."

"They're what?" Jerry cried. "Listen! Two people have died because of them. This isn't the only case of phonies, either. Mrs. Brice's gems are paste. She even received an anonymous note saying they were."

"My goodness," the expert said. "I know Mrs. Brice, of course. Perhaps I'd better go up there."

"Wait a minute." Jerry checked him. "Just who are you two, anyhow?"

"We work for Ivan Karpova, sir. We are trusted employees and inasmuch as our firm once certified these gems as genuine, we came here to satisfy ourselves that they still are."

"Chris," Jerry said. "Take this guy over to the Brice house and stand by while he checks the stuff. Come back as soon as he has a report to make."

JERRY sat down across from Mrs. Wonacott.

"Now let's get down to facts," he said firmly. "I've had a look at these jewels now on the table. They're real all right, but the ones I photographed were not. I can back up that statement by informing you—if you don't already know it—that the young man who carried the film away was murdered outside your home. It was done for one reason—to get those films, the only proof that the gems I photographed were phony."

"I'm afraid it's all beyond me," she said plaintively. "Of course, I think you are wrong. The gems are quite genuine. Mr. Karpova's men say so."

"After I left," Jerry said, "what did you do? I mean by that, were those gems left in this room for any length of time unguarded?"

"Why—yes, I suppose so. My butler was outside telling the police what he knew about that unfortunate affair on the street. My maids were upstairs and I left the room in order to telephone my insurance company."

Jerry walked to a window overlooking the rear of the house. It was open about half an inch. He raised it high, lit a match and studied the window sill for a moment.

"Well, Mrs. Wonacott," he said, "you can consider yourself the most fortunate of people. A burglar entered this room and actually exchanged real gems for the phonies. There's a scratch on the window sill, probably made by the intruder's shoe or, possibly, by a button. Anyway, I'm certain this burglary in reverse is an accomplished fact."

"But why in the world would anyone do such a thing?" she demanded, bewildered. "Why exchange false pieces for valuable ones?"

"Lady," Jerry told her, "if I knew the answer to that one, we could get on with

writing the publicity which seems to have started all this. By the way, did you receive any anonymous letters concerning your gems?"

"Indeed, I did not," Mrs. Wonacott snapped.

"If you do, phone Sergeant Orr at Police Headquarters and he'll take care of matters," Jerry suggested. "Thanks for your help and now, while I'm standing here to watch, scoop up those rocks and stow them in your safe. In the morning, take them back to your bank vault."

Jerry even helped her do this and he asked one more significant question.

"Did you tell anyone about your intention to have the gems photographed and written up?"

"Why, yes. Naturally, I boasted about it to some friends. I also phoned Mr. Willoughby because I would have liked to have had him in the picture also. After all, it was his brain that created the designs, his hands which did the work."

"What did Willoughby say about it?"

"I didn't talk to him. He wasn't in the shop. But I did tell Mr. Hargrave to give Willoughby my message. That was—well, approximately an hour before you and your party arrived."

"Thank you," Jerry said. "You've been more helpful than you realize. Remember to watch for an anonymous note and above all, guard those gems. If Miss Stuart calls, tell her I'm on my way to Mrs. Brice's house."

BUT Chris was coming up the walk as Jerry stepped out of the house. He led her to the sidewalk and they took a taxi. Jerry told the driver to take them to Police Headquarters.

"That expert is still at Mrs. Brice's," Chris reported as they started off. "He had gone over three-quarters of the stuff when I left. You were right—it's all phony. That anonymous note she got told the truth. Jerry, I wonder who could have sent it—and why?"

"We'll find out," Jerry promised. "The real puzzler now is why somebody slipped into the Wonacott house and exchanged real gems for those fakes I photographed. Plenty of evidence to show that happened, but none at all to help establish a motive for such funny business."

"What about the vanishing blood-stains?" Chris asked.

Jerry patted the candid camera slung over one shoulder.

"I've got the evidence that they did exist right in there. Soon as I get a chance, I'll print the pics and show Sergeant Orr that my imagination wasn't working overtime. In fact, I think I'll see Orr right now. He's supposed to be putting that punk McCardle over the coals."

"I phoned in to the office all I knew about the story already," Chris said.

"What can I do now?"

"Step into the lobby of my apartment house there," Jerry said, and indicated a building across the street from Police Headquarters. "McCardle will come out shortly. Orr can't hold him long and he knows it. Trail McCardle. And be careful—McCardle's no dope."

CHAPTER V

MURDER OF AN APPRAISER



SERGEANT ORR was alone in his office when Jerry Wade entered.

"McCardle is out front arranging for bail," he said disgustedly. "Don't ever think those insurance companies never take care of their own. After he's free, McCardle has agreed to talk to me. That is, I'll talk and he'll listen and make faces. Kid, this business is getting me down. I'm afraid it will wind up in the unsolved box and join the only other one I couldn't break during the last three years."

"Hmm," Jerry mused. "I know the case you mean. A chiseling jeweler named Bryant. He was found shot through the heart about two years ago. I took some shots of the scene, remember?"

"I'm not liable to forget until I've pinched his murderer," Orr grunted. "We have the bullet that killed him. All I need is the gun and the guy who used it."

"And what's your opinion on this latest case?" Jerry asked.

"It's fairly clear," Orr said. "Willoughby took his clients' money, gave them real stuff to be appraised, and when the jewels were brought back for

final adjustment he made the switch. Willoughby knew about the publicity those gems were going to get and realized he'd be exposed as a crook. He probably told that to somebody else who was in with him. This last guy figured that Willoughby's number was up anyhow and shot him."

"Your logic is awful," Jerry said, and grinned. "Mrs. Wonacott's mess of phony stuff was swiped just a little while ago and the real gems left in their place. Now would a crook and murderer do a thing like that? No sir, not unless by so doing, he might save himself."

"All right," Orr said, "I'm dumb. I still don't see your point."

"It's simple, Sarge. Willoughby was in on it. He must have been. He killed himself. Someone else, in league with him, fixed things to look like murder so Willoughby wouldn't be suspected of anything. Then this same man went to Mrs. Wonacott's and exchanged the phony stuff for the real. In that way, I'd have been shown up as a plain fool, the death of Mike Brody listed as an accident, and the loss of my roll of film just a coincidence. Just one thing stopped all that from actually happening."

"What's the point?" Orr said impatiently. "I still don't believe it anyway."

"There is another person who is trying to let us know that many of Willoughby's clients were gypped. He is distributing those anonymous notes and our murderer knew nothing about this angle until after he'd taken all those other precautions."

Sergeant Orr's phone rang. He answered it, grunted a few times, and made some notes.

"Another one of those anonymous letters, Kid," he said, when he hung up. "Some more of the Willoughby jewelry has been examined and it's faked. Maybe you're right about all this. I'm getting a new hunch and it concerns the appraisers who looked over the stuff. They might be involved."

"It's worth working on," Jerry agreed. "Suppose I tackle this Russian, Karpova, and Roger Graham who appraised Mrs. Brice's stuff. They might talk to me when a cop would scare the daylight out of them."

"Sure," Orr agreed and fumbled in a desk drawer. "I've got the designs of Mrs. Brice's gems. Take them along,

just in case. Found them in Willoughby's house along with a lot of others."

Jerry glanced at the designs and slipped the papers into his pocket. He left Orr's office, went to the Pawnshop Squad's quarters and checked Roger Graham in their records. Graham was little more than a high-class pawnbroker.

IT WAS ten-fifteen, so the chances were that Roger Graham's shop was still open. Jerry left Headquarters quickly. Chris was across the street in the doorway, but Jerry gave her no signal. McCardle was still inside and her job was to trail him.

A cab brought Jerry to Roger Graham's place in less than ten minutes. It was open, but the window shades were drawn and the window displays removed. Graham was getting ready to close. The door was locked, too, but an elderly man Jerry took to be Graham let him in.

Jerry identified himself and put the whole thing up to Graham bluntly. Graham leaned against a counter and shook his head.

"I heard radio broadcasts about the death of Willoughby," he said. "He was one of the greatest jewelry designers and creators in the world. Yes, I examined Mrs. Brice's purchases some time ago. Just how many I do not recall, but she always brought them here. Willoughby had a habit of insisting that all his work be appraised by a disinterested person."

"You examined the stuff closely?" Jerry queried.

"Minutely is a better word. All of Willoughby's work interested me, so I paid particular attention. Just what did you wish to know about the gems?"

"Were any of them fakes?"

"Good heavens, no! I'll swear to that. They were real—glorious pieces and worth a great deal of money. Every one that I saw was authentic."

"What happened after you appraised them?"

"Mrs. Brice would bring them back to Willoughby for final adjustment. Clasps, pins and things like that. A final check-up. Quite usual."

Jerry saw one of his premises going up in smoke. He had never too strongly considered the appraisers as crooks.

There were at least two of them—more probably, now that Sergeant Orr had received word that another batch was phony.

Jerry had more questions to ask, however. He was facing the door and could look out on the street. He saw a car pull up and McCardle emerge. Instantly Jerry ducked behind a counter and made his way to a back room.

"Don't tell this man I'm here," he said. "Watch out for him. He's a private detective hired to locate the stolen stuff."

From the back room, Jerry had to content himself with just listening. He didn't dare risk peering through the curtains. McCardle was smart enough to keep his eyes open.

For the next ten minutes, Jerry heard the private detective in action. McCardle whined, pleaded and threatened. He seemed certain that Graham knew what had happened to the real gems. Graham kept denying it steadfastly. Finally, McCardle seemed to give up. With a final warning to the jeweler, he walked noisily toward the door. Jerry heard it open. Ten seconds later, every light in the place went out.

Jerry fumbled around the unfamiliar back room. He heard a shrill scream that was cut off abruptly. At last he reached the curtains and passed through them. The front door was closed. Nobody moved. Jerry lit a match. He saw two things almost simultaneously.

Graham lay behind his counter with a knife through his heart. Nearby, was an electric switch-box, its door opened wide. Jerry snapped the lights on again, barely touching the switch to do so. There was a vague chance of fingerprints.

HE EXAMINED Graham and when he found there was nothing he could do he went to the big safe at the rear of the store. The door was open, for Graham had been putting things away. As he pawed through the safe, Jerry debated whether or not McCardle could have killed Graham. Certainly, if he hadn't, the murderer had acted fast, practically entering as the private detective left.

Jerry thought of Chris. She had been trailing McCardle, so it was likely that she was outside, keeping the store under

surveillance. If so, she'd had an excellent chance of seeing the killer.

Jerry came across a chamois pouch, carelessly thrown to the rear of the safe. He opened this and spilled out four large gems. They were oddly cut and something clicked in his mind. He took them over to a counter, turned on a small lamp and gazed at the pieces for a few seconds. Then he drew out the original designs of Mrs. Brice's gems.

It required only a few moments to discover that the four stones in Graham's safe matched the curiously odd designs made up by Willoughby. Either Graham had lied, or the murderer had deliberately sacrificed a small fortune to establish the guilt of the dead appraiser.

These gems were all right. They had the deep, warm sparkle of the real McCoy.

Jerry went over to a telephone and called Sergeant Orr. He made a report of the murder and agreed to stick around until men arrived.

Jerry meant to do that, too, but he was worried about Chris. Perhaps she had just gone on trailing McCardle, but he had to know. He stepped outside and looked around for her, then called her name, but without result. Jerry was half frantic by the time Sergeant Orr and his squad arrived.

"So McCardle did it, huh?" Orr grunted. "Wait until I lay my hands on him again! Just a second. I'll send out an alarm."

"Hold it," Jerry said. "We've got to play this carefully. I have an idea that Chris was snatched. Otherwise, she'd have entered the store to find out what was up, for she must have been outside, and if McCardle left in a big rush, Chris has brains enough to try and find out what happened in here."

"Okay, Kid," Orr said. "It's your party."

"Don't arrest McCardle," Jerry advised. "Don't even say anything to him about Graham being dead. When he's picked up just have him escorted to your office for further questioning. Get Sam Cass there, too—and Lloyd Hargrave. I'll develop this shot of the bloodstains and stick around my apartment in case Chris phones. Give me an hour, and by that time you should have those suspects rounded up."

Jerry taxied back to his apartment

across the street from Police Headquarters. He had purposely selected the location because he could roll almost as fast as the police cars did when something big broke.

It was a comfortable place of four rooms. One was fitted up as a dark room. Jerry removed his hat and coat, rolled up his sleeves and went into the lab. There he developed the film expertly. The negative dried fast under a warm blower and Jerry slipped it into an enlarger.

As he focused the shot, he could see the bloodstains. The finished blown-up print was clear and the bloodstains distinct.

Jerry listened intently for the telephone or the door buzzer, and when a full hour had passed he knew that Chris must have run into trouble. Jerry had no way of finding out what had happened to her, unless McCardle could tell him, and the private detective was cleverly evasive. Perhaps McCardle didn't even know.

Jerry determined to find out though. He blotted the wet print hurriedly, donned his hat and coat, and went over to Sergeant Orr's office.

CHAPTER VI

BORROWED EVIDENCE



MCARDLE, Sam Cass and Lloyd Hargrave were all in the Homicide sergeant's office, impatiently waiting for Orr to give a reason why they had been summoned to Police Headquarters.

Jerry laid the photograph on a chair, face down, and put his hat on top of it. Then he talked to these three men, in a friendly manner, although he strongly suspected that one of this trio was a murderer or, at least, the brains behind a band of killers.

"I thought getting the three of you together might bring some results," he said. "Sergeant Orr agreed with me, so we sent for you."

"Sent"—McCardle grimaced—"is a poor word to express the way I was dragged down here. And I'm out on bail, don't forget that. I'll leave here any time I wish."

Jerry pointed to the door. "It isn't locked, Mr. McCardle. Go ahead."

"I'll stay," McCardle grunted. "I might as well find out what's on your mind, seeing I'm here. But before you begin, let me speak my little piece. I'm a legally appointed representative of various insurance companies. If any policy holders have been robbed or cheated, it's my job to locate the jewelry that is missing. I'm interested in nothing else."

"Naturally," Jerry placated him. "Perhaps I can help you locate the stuff. First of all, I believe Willoughby committed suicide. Don't ask me why he did. I don't know. More important than that, however, I also believe that the real instigators of this grand larceny scheme are the appraisers. The men who handled those gems."

"He's goofy," McCardle derided.

"No—let him talk," Hargrave put in. "There may be something in what he says. Why do you think they are guilty, Wade?"

"Three people handled those gems," Jerry explained. "Willoughby designed and made them. He was paid for the job and, therefore, he could have no motive in substituting fakes for the real thing. After all, he had spent a lifetime building up a big business. Those who paid for the gems kept them in bank vaults most of the time. There was little chance that either of these parties are responsible for what happened."

Sam Cass smiled a little and shook his head.

"You're way off the track, Jerry. Take Karpova, for instance. His reputation is equal to that of Willoughby."

"That I don't know," Jerry confessed. "But I'd rather take Roger Graham. He's a rather stubborn man, isn't he, McCardle?"

The private detective just stared, but his face was growing paler as if he anticipated Jerry's next move.

"Own up, McCardle," Jerry said flatly. "I was in Graham's back room when you entered. I heard you browbeat him, plead with him and even try to bribe him. He insisted that he knew nothing of the gems beyond the fact that they were genuine when he examined them."

"Snooping little rat!" McCardle said between his teeth.

"Sure." Jerry grinned. "Reporters and cops are snoopers, but when it

comes to fancy snooping, a private dick has it all over us. Why did you kill him, McCardle?"

"Kill who?" McCardle exploded. "Graham? Are you nuts?"

"I am not, and Graham happens to be dead—knifed—and if you were not in the store when it happened, McCardle, you certainly were no more than two feet from the front door. How about it?"

McCARDLE was no longer blustering. He half arose from his chair.

"Now see here, I don't know a thing about it! Why should I kill Graham? But come to think of it, there was a big car parked half a block along the street from where I had mine. I drove away—fast. I had reports to make."

Sergeant Orr leaned forward. "There is no bail on a charge of suspected murder, McCardle. This time all the lawyers in town won't do you any good."

"But I didn't—" McCardle began.

"Hold it," Jerry broke in. "I didn't see McCardle swing a knife. His story stands, unless we prove him a liar. There's nothing to hold him on, Sarge."

"Thanks," McCardle grunted. "You play square, anyhow."

"Suppose we get on with our lesson," Jerry said. "The murderer will come out when we back him against a wall. To do that, we must first run down the clues we have. For my money, there are too doggone many. Yet many point to those appraisers. I'm going to see Karpova tonight. Do you gentlemen know anything against him?"

"He has done considerable work for Willoughby," Hargrave said. "We've always found the man reliable."

"He was too good a friend of Willoughby's to harm him," Cass said.

"The insurance companies trust him implicitly," McCardle said. "So do I."

Jerry put one hand in his pocket and curled fingers around that chamois bag of stones taken from jewelry which Willoughby had sold.

"I suppose you have the same opinion of Graham?" he asked casually.

All three men chorused assent. Jerry flung the four stones on Orr's desk.

"Then revise your opinions, gentlemen, because I found those in Graham's safe. It was open, so I had no trouble searching it. Those stones were paid for

by Mrs. Brice and she never received them. Now do you see why I suspect those appraisers? They may be working hand in glove."

Only McCardle offered a remark. "Well, I'll be darned," he said.

"That's all," Jerry told them. "I found what I wanted to know. If Graham could fool all three of you, Karpova and any others could do the same thing. Sorry if you were inconvenienced. Good-night."

They filed out with evident reluctance. Sam Cass, especially, seemed on the verge of asking permission to stay and ask questions. Jerry didn't look at him.

When the door closed, Jerry sank into a chair.

"Sarge," he said, "I'm worried sick. No word from Chris. She's been taken by this bunch of thieves and killers! I know it!"

"I'll do all I can to help find her," Orr said.

"I know that. Sarge—you don't think I actually believe the appraisers did the job? That was a grandstand play, the setting for a little game. If I win it, I'll find Chris. If I lose—well, I'm no worse off than I was before."

"What's the angle, Kid?" Orr asked curiously.

"There isn't any—yet. I'm just building up to one. I'm convinced, though, that the man who killed Graham placed those rocks in his safe because the murderer wants us to believe the appraisers are responsible. If one of the men present here tonight is mixed up in the scheme, he'll see to it that Karpova is involved just as Graham was. Why? Because that killer thinks I'm sure of the guilt of the appraisers."

"Yeah," Orr groaned. "Just like that, huh? Want another headache, Kid? Look—two more of those anonymous notes. The people who got them can't examine their stuff until the banks open tomorrow, but you can bet on it the stuff will be found to be phony."

JERRY read the identical notes, then reached into Orr's desk drawer. Apparently, he placed both the notes there, but one of them was neatly palmed. Orr couldn't lend out evidence of this kind, but Jerry could borrow it.

"You can do me a big favor right now, Sarge," he said. "I'm not running my

car because it won't operate on air, so if you'll arrange a ride for me in a hurry—"

Orr did and Jerry was promptly deposited in front of the swanky apartment house where Ivan Karpova lived. He had to announce his arrival before he could be taken up. When he spoke to the appraiser over the house phone, Karpova granted his request the instant Jerry mentioned Willoughby.

"Did anyone else want to see Karpova tonight?" Jerry asked the switchboard operator.

"No, sir. Pretty late for most people, though Mr. Karpova does have 'em coming at all hours."

Jerry laid a five-dollar bill on the tiny counter.

"If anybody else wants to see him, don't mention that I'm up there. Call Karpova in ten minutes, and I think he'll tell you the same thing."

Karpova had the door open upstairs before Jerry was down the wide corridor. The Russian was a slightly-built man, about Jerry's size. He had a shock of jet-black hair, wore a wing collar and a red blouse, heavily decorated. It looked like the top of a pair of pajamas to Jerry, but he knew Russians went for those blouse things.

"Please come in," Karpova said. "I have been most anxious to talk with someone who knows about poor Willoughby. It was murder, the radio says."

Jerry began to talk at once, in his most persuasive manner. Every moment meant more danger for Chris. He gave Karpova a swift resumé of the case.

"So Graham is dead," Jerry concluded, "some stolen gems were planted in his safe and I have reason to believe that the same trick may be worked on you."

Karpova made one wild dive that took him in the direction of a telephone. Jerry got there first and clamped his hand down on the instrument.

"No police—not yet," he said. "There is a better way. I'll take your place. Lend me a shirt like that—a wing collar and one of those—ah—red blouses. Lend me a pair of glasses, too. Then we'll turn the lights low, and anybody who comes—unless it is someone you know well—won't know the difference."

"Agreed!" Karpova shouted and started peeling off his blouse. "You are

willing to risk being killed in my place. Why should I object? But suppose no one comes?"

"Then," Jerry said softly, "I'll probably curse myself for the rest of my life. It's logical that my idea will work. It has to work. Switch off most of the lights, will you?"

CHAPTER VII

APPOINTMENT WITH MURDER

BEFORE Jerry was dressed in the Russian's clothing, the phone rang.

"It is the house phone!" Karpova exclaimed excitedly. "Someone in the lobby!"

"Answer it," Jerry instructed. "Tell the operator to send your visitor up. Then you beat it to the farthest room in this suite. Stay out of the way if fireworks start."

Karpova made his request, and ran noisily for a rear room. Jerry buttoned the blouse high around his neck and adjusted the glasses so he could see over them. There was only one light on—a desk lamp with its shade pulled low.

Jerry opened the door when the buzzer sounded. A smiling, well-dressed man stood there.

"I'm sorry to disturb you this late, Mr. Karpova," he said, "but it is urgent."

"Do I know you?" Jerry asked gruffly.

"No, we've never met, but your reputation is such that I'm sure no other person could help me out. Of course, I'll pay anything you wish."

"Come inside."

Jerry stepped away from the door, and took good care never to present his back to this suave man. He was a total stranger to Jerry.

The visitor sat down at the desk. Jerry went to the opposite side.

"Now, how can I help you?" he asked.

The visitor laid a gleaming emerald on the desk.

"I'd like to have you appraise that."

"Ah—so." Jerry drew the stone toward him. "Do you have any doubts that this is not a genuine stone?"

The visitor arose and walked around the desk. It was coming now, Jerry realized. This maneuver was meant to put the killer in a position where he could strike fast.

The man started to bend down over Jerry's shoulder. One hand touched the gem.

"Well, you see," he began, "there does appear to be a flaw. On that side. Look closer."

Jerry's right hand was hidden beneath the desk. His fingers curled into a fist. Suddenly he jumped up and the fist traveled like a bolt of lightning. The visitor had a knife in one hand, but Jerry's attack was so swift and unexpected he had no time to use it. Jerry plastered him squarely on the chin.

The man, rocked back by the blow, shouted a curse and raised the knife. Jerry buried both fists in the killer's midriff, made him curl up, then shoved him back. He sprang toward the knife hand, gave it a terrific twist, and the blade clattered to the floor.

Jerry had once been intent on winning a bantam-weight boxing championship. That was before a camera became his greatest interest. He had been trained in the ring and knew all the tricks. He made use of that knowledge now.

Before the killer could straighten up, Jerry let him have a haymaker flush to the jaw. That settled it. The killer went down in a heap. Jerry kicked the knife into a corner, bent over the man and rapidly searched him. There wasn't even a handkerchief in his pockets. Not a mark of identification on his clothes. All had been neatly removed.

KARPOVA stole into the room, holding a gigantic brass vase with both hands. Jerry hastily turned on some lights. Karpova dropped the vase, took a look at the man on the floor, then spotted that emerald. With a cry he rushed to the desk, almost stumbling over the killer's recumbent form. He picked up the emerald.

"This belongs to Mrs. Green!" he squealed excitedly. "There is no mistake. It was one of the gems I appraised for her. Came from John Wiloughby's place."

Jerry took him by one arm and led him into another room.

"Those birds don't seem to mind the expense involved in pinning the blame on you and the other appraisers," he said. "Karpova, you've got to help me now."

"Of course. Anything you say. You saved my life."

"That crook in there is no mug. He's smooth and won't be fooled easily. Go to the telephone, contact Sergeant Orr at Police Headquarters, and have him stand by until this man wakes up. When he does, and can see you, get excited. Say you want a policeman right away and that you have a gun to defend yourself with if the man recovers consciousness."

"Yes—yes," Karpova gulped. "Then what happens? I have no gun."

"You won't need one. This bird will snap out of it and run out of here faster than Rommel traveled over the desert. I want him to get away. After he is gone, explain to Sergeant Orr just what I told you. He's stirring. Better get set. Good luck and hang onto that emerald."

Jerry hurried down to the lobby, found it virtually deserted, and took up a position behind one huge marble pillar. He didn't have long to wait. The killer came out of the elevator as if he'd been shot from it. He skidded along the smooth floor.

Outside, he kept running. Jerry was after him, but maintained a respectable distance. If this killer even guessed he was being followed, Jerry's whole plan would fall through.

Camera banging against his side, Jerry followed the trail to the nearest subway station. He had removed Karpova's blouse and glasses, and again wore his own blue suit, but he also still wore the winged collar shirt and it seemed somewhat out of place. Jerry wrapped his coat collar around it.

He piled into a downtown bus with the killer and took a seat well behind him. The man switched to a crosstown bus, got off at a quiet intersection and walked rapidly down the street. Jerry saw him turn quickly and look back.

The killer had been fast in performing that trick, but he made one little mistake by slowing up, and Jerry had darted out of sight. The killer walked another block and finally turned into a doorway between two lighted windows. When Jerry reached the place, he saw that it was a small hand laundry.

A bulbous-nosed man with touseled black hair lounged behind the counter reading a racing paper. The killer was

nowhere in sight. Jerry hurried to the next corner and rummaged through a rubbish basket until he had a sizable roll of papers. He thrust these under one arm, like a bundle of laundry and returned to the place.

It was early morning now and the street deserted. Jerry realized that once he invaded this stronghold, he couldn't expect help to arrive fast. But Chris might be there—or men who knew where she was being held. Jerry could not delay any longer. Chris, he knew, had the wits and smoothness of tongue to stall any aggressive action for a certain length of time, but she had been missing several hours now. Jerry's concern for her had grown alarmingly.

HE WALKED boldly into the laundry. The bulbous-nosed man glanced at him, reached for a check with one hand and the bundle of supposed laundry with the other. That left him wide open for a sucker sock, and Jerry was in no mood to give him an even break.

The man draped across the counter, out completely. Jerry dragged him to the floor, tore some laundry into strips and tied him up. Then he carefully approached the back room. It was cluttered with ironing boards, mangles and dye vats. No one was there.

There was a rear door, securely bolted from inside. Otherwise, no way for the killer to have merely used the laundry as an escape from possible shadows.

Jerry knew there hadn't been time enough for the bulbous-nosed man to have locked the door after the killer and then returned to the front of the store by the time Jerry himself had returned. That meant the killer had used some secret passage. Jerry searched for it. Finally, he went back to the man he had knocked out. It was likely that fellow would not wake up for a long time. Satisfied, Jerry returned to the back room.

Some shirts had been left on one ironing board and Jerry's attention was attracted to a crimson spot directly on the shirt pocket. It looked like blood. He examined it closer. A small arrow had been painted on the flat surface with lipstick. That was the "blood-stain." The arrow pointed straight toward a blank wall.

Jerry felt a little better. That was

Chris' work, without a doubt. She was here, or she had been here recently.

Jerry approached the blank wall. It consisted of narrow boards. A clothes hook was screwed into it just above his head. He reached up and tried to twist the hook. It wouldn't move. He pulled down on it and shook his head. That wouldn't do it, because any clothes hung there would open the secret door if this hook were some kind of lever. Instead, Jerry pushed up on it, and leaned heavily against the wall.

A narrow section gave way under this pressure. The hook merely served as a latch. There was a small landing and steps which led upward. As Jerry closed the door softly, he could hear muffled voices from somewhere above.

Climbing the staircase cautiously, Jerry found himself in a big, musty dark room where another stairway led to other rooms on a floor above. Light, dim light, came from an open doorway of one of them. He moved up the second stairway toward the light, back against the wall, nerves and muscles tensed to leap into action.

"I've told you everything I know," a clear, feminine voice was saying.

"We don't think so," a man's voice answered. "Anyway, since you are the Candid Camera Kid's girl friend, we'll just keep you here for a while. If he starts sizing things up right, we can hold him back through you. Behave yourself and there won't be any trouble. You'll be well fed. We'll provide newspapers and magazines."

"Thanks," Chris answered. "Your generosity overwhelms me."

"Word of honor you won't make a break for it?" the same man's voice queried.

"Not on your life," Chris retorted heatedly. "I'll get out of this rat-trap the first chance I get."

"Then you'll be tied up," the man declared. "Just a few more questions first. When you and Wade found Willoughby's body, what did Wade do?"

"He broke out a flag, waved it, and cheered," Chris snapped.

There were more questions and more angry replies which wholly evaded the issue. Jerry, meanwhile, moved slowly toward the open door. He quietly opened the leather case swinging at his side and took out a flash-gun reflector. Holding

this away from him, he moved it until it mirrored the people in that room so that he could study them all without exposing himself.

He saw that it was an attic room, dimly candlelighted, where the only light, in the daytime, came from the trap-door in the ceiling, an opening which apparently led to the low roof. A short ladder reached to the trap-door which now was open, and through it Jerry could see tall buildings silhouetted against the skyline.

There were three men present. One was the fellow Jerry had followed here. A second could have been the twin brother of the bulbous-nosed man downstairs, even to the tousled black hair—except that this one wore a green suit instead of the work clothes that clad the man downstairs. The third was about thirty, well-dressed, and smooth as silk. Chris, in the red dress Jerry remembered she had been wearing, sat in a chair facing the door. All three men were watching her closely, their faces grim, their jaws set.

Jerry thought for a moment. No guns were exposed. These men felt too certain of themselves with only a girl for prisoner. Chris had not been harmed, and so far they had not carried out their threat to tie her up.

CHAPTER VIII

ESCAPE



THE Candid Camera Kid moved away from the door. He crept back down the two staircases and went into the laundry. The man he had socked was still out.

Jerry went to work. He carefully arranged a stack of loaded laundry baskets, just outside the hidden door and near the foot of the stairs, a stack towering as high as he could reach by standing on a chair. This done, he crept back up to the attic and left the hidden door open, propped so that he could get through it in a hurry.

He adjusted his shutter speed and lens opening for weak lighting effects, tiptoed toward the room where Chris was, and used the reflector again. The men had not switched positions. Jerry knew that by invading the place and battling all three he would have little

chance of getting away. Chris might be hurt, too. It was better to trick them, if he could, though he had his gun handy and ready for use in a sudden emergency.

Only the bulbous-nosed man's twin was in any position to spot Jerry, and he seemed utterly bored by the whole business. His chair was tipped back against the wall and he calmly picked his teeth with a match stick.

Jerry stepped into the doorway. Chris saw him, but gave no evidence of the excitement that surged through her. Jerry motioned with his hand that she was to bolt through the door, then he aimed his camera.

"Hey!" he yelled at the top of his voice, and his camera clicked.

The man on the tilted-back chair lost his boredom then. He moved faster than Jerry Wade had imagined any man could move. He made one leap for Chris, as the two other men whirled and got between him and Chris, and Jerry. And before Jerry could blink the man in the green suit had slapped Chris resoundingly, grabbed up her limp form—the blow must have stunned her temporarily—and had raced with her up the ladder to the trap-door.

Jerry had his hands full. Both the other men had pounced for him. Luckily for the Candid Camera Kid, however—and for Chris—neither of his opponents was a seasoned fist fighter. A left to one, a right to the other put them both down in one-two order, but Jerry had no time to see that either was out. That other man just climbing through the skylight was getting away with Chris!

Jerry's gun was out instantly, he sprang up the ladder, and took careful aim as he fired. He had to get that tousled-haired man where the bullet would miss Chris. The man certainly moved fast, too, for the instant he was through the skylight his gun was out and he was firing back at Jerry. Their two shots were almost simultaneous—but Jerry's was the lucky one.

With a yell, the man in the green suit reeled and tumbled, dropping Chris who apparently had quickly come out of her daze. For instantly she was up, scrambling down the ladder. The two men Jerry had downed were reeling to their feet, but Chris darted between them and was past Jerry before either of them

could stop her. Jerry grabbed up his camera and he was on Christine's heels.

"Get them!" one of the men yelled.

Pursuit started quickly, once they recovered their wits. Chris reached the first floor and went through the hidden door. So did Jerry, but he skidded to a halt and gave that big stack of laundry baskets he had placed outside the secret door a shove. They were poised to topple over and they did. The men running down the stairs were met by an avalanche of dirty laundry and baskets.

JERRY seized Chris by the hand and sprinted from the place. They found a taxi at the corner and jumped in. Jerry looked through the rear window in time to see two of Chris' captors surge out of the laundry, look in all directions, then rush back inside. They wouldn't stay there long.

"Whew!" he breathed. "We beat Man-O'-War covering that block. Are you all right, Chris? Why are you staring at me that way?"

"I don't like your collar, Jerry Wade,"

ask them. I was never struck. In fact, that fellow who bossed the whole business was a rather nice-looking chap, didn't you think?"

"Oh, sure," Jerry said dryly. "Very handsome for a killer. Listen, Chris, that jeweler McCardle visited was murdered. An attempt was made to kill another man who appraised some of those gems which Willoughby worked up into jewelry. Two or three more anonymous notes have appeared. And one of the bigshots in the mob is a handsome, gentlemanly sort, is he? You're goofy. That mug would have slit your throat for a dime."

Chris shuddered. "I—didn't know, Jerry. Who killed the jeweler? McCardle?"

"The killer is one of the men who helped snatch you. That's all I can tell you—now. We're going to my place. I want to develop the picture I took of that pretty family group. Perhaps we can run down one of those three monkeys, if the one I plugged is still alive. Didn't have time to find out."

Next Issue: KNIFE IN MY BACK, by Sam Merwin, Jr.

Chris said. "Where on earth did you ever get it?"

After Jerry stopped chuckling, Chris explained how she had been taken.

"I followed McCardle to that jewelry store, saw him go in, and I slipped up toward the door. They were talking and not too friendly, either. I was going to have a look at McCardle's automobile when someone put a hand over my mouth and another man picked me up by the ankles. The pair of them carried me to another car so fast I couldn't even start kicking."

"Was McCardle one of them?" Jerry asked. "He left the store, but about half a minute later either he returned or someone else entered."

"It could have been McCardle," Chris said. "My back was turned. Anyway, one of the two men disappeared. The other threatened to sock me if I squawked and I was driven to the laundry."

"The rats!" Jerry growled.

"They treated me very well," Chris said. "When I refused to answer their questions, they just quietly continued to

At his home, Chris talked to Jerry from outside the dark room as he worked on the film.

"They were especially insistent that I tell what we did at Willoughby's before calling the police," she said. "I didn't answer that one."

"They know I take pictures of everything," Jerry called back. "A short time ago I talked to Sergeant Orr in front of McCardle, Sam Cass and Hargrave. I had a picture of the blood-stained desk with me, but I didn't show it. Just laid the thing on a chair. One of those three men probably guessed what it was."

Jerry came out of the dark room with a dripping print. It was a good shot under the poor lighting conditions there had been. He slapped it onto an electric dryer and sipped coffee which Chris had made. In ten minutes the picture was dry. They walked across the street to Police Headquarters, first making certain none of those killers were around.

SERGEANT ORR, sleepy-eyed by this time, had the picture of the blood-stained desk propped up before him.

He jumped up, smiling, when he saw Chris.

"So you found her okay. That's swell! Chris, they didn't hurt you?"

"Those guys?" Jerry said derisively. "Heck, no, they were too, too polite. Chris enjoyed her little visit. Well, Sarge, are you convinced now that there were bloodstains on Willoughby's desk?"

"Yes—they're clear enough in the picture. Either Sam Cass or Hargrave wiped them off. Both were in that room long enough to dry-clean it."

"And don't forget McCardle," Jerry grunted. "He used the private entrance and could have spent a few seconds in the room before Sam Cass and Hargrave arrived. One of those men, Sarge, is our killer and thief. Take a look at this shot, will you? It shows the men who snatched Chris."

Orr studied the picture. He looked up with a grin.

"You look nice, Chris."

"Come on," Jerry urged. "Who are the monkeys?"

"The smooth-looking one—Lockwood—is one of the slickest jewel thieves and salesmen of hot stuff we've ever known. I thought he was out on the Coast. We'll pick him up, Jerry. Want to file a complaint, Chris?"

"She won't have to," Jerry said. "When this is over, you'll have him on more than kidnaping."

Orr yawned. "Jerry," he said, "I wonder if you're not running along the wrong trail. It seems to me that Willoughby is responsible for all this. The other guys are just trying to salvage what they can or else locate Willoughby's loot."

Jerry took Chris by the arm and they walked to the door.

"That kind of thinking, Sarge," he declared flatly, "is what keeps you from being an inspector. We're dealing with mighty smart crooks. They are creating as many blind alleys as possible—including trying to pin the blame on the appraisers who handle the stuff."

"Isn't it time we both got a little sleep?" Chris asked in a tired voice.

"We'll sleep better when the killers are behind bars," Jerry grunted. "Right now, we'll go back to Willoughby's house. I've got a feeling we might find something there. Anyhow, I want a look at his papers."

CHAPTER IX

SOUVENIR OF MURDER



TAXI deposited Jerry and Chris two blocks from Willoughby's house. They went to the back of the place and approached the rear door, which McCardle had used.

"Before I left," Jerry whispered, "I fixed this door so it wouldn't lock. Take it easy now—no telling what we may run into."

He opened the door and they crept silently up the stairs. The house was as quiet as a tomb. Jerry turned on the lights in the room where Willoughby had been found dead.

"Open the door to the hallway a crack," he whispered. "Stand there and keep listening. Warn me if you even imagine you hear anything."

Chris obeyed while Jerry sat down behind Willoughby's desk and began a methodical search. Most of the contents of the desk drawers consisted of jewelry designs, a few of the drawings block-lettered.

Jerry drew one of those anonymous warning cards from his pocket and laid it down beside some of Willoughby's block lettering. The card was block-lettered, too, and the work was identical. Even the ink was the same.

"Look, Chris. Willoughby wrote those anonymous notes! He warned his own customers that the stuff he'd sold them was phony. This is a new wrinkle."

"But he's dead!" Chris argued. "So how could he write and distribute the cards?"

"He wrote them some time ago," Jerry said. "Must have known that exposure was coming. It involves him, but he did his best to atone. This makes my theory of suicide even stronger. But why should anyone remove the gun and change the position of Willoughby's body to make it look like murder? And who is distributing these cards?"

Chris just looked blank and went back to listen at the door. Jerry kept checking, searching for secret compartments.

Chris hissed a warning. She motioned that someone was downstairs. Jerry arose quickly and went to her side. He heard whoever it was close the front door quietly and walk into the living room.

Jerry and Chris tiptoed along the second floor hallway, and were getting ready to descend the staircase when there was a distinct click from the front door again. More visitors!

Jerry and Chris crouched below the railing. They saw the front door open and two men who held guns entered.

"Two of the men who kept me prisoner," Chris murmured.

Jerry nodded, busy screwing a flash-bulb into his camera reflector. The two men moved toward the living room, apparently ready to open fire, perhaps murder the first person who tried to interfere with them.

Jerry saw a light switch at the head of the stairs, one that undoubtedly controlled the light in the reception hall. The man in the living room must have slipped up the steps and turned this, to work by its glow that carried into the room, for he certainly had turned on no other lights.

The smooth-looking gunman had his nickel-plated pistol half-raised for quick shooting as he drew nearer the living room entrance. A cold smile touched his lips. When he tensed to spring into the room, Christine snapped the light switch and the house was plunged into inky darkness.

THERE was a shout of alarm from the living room, curses from the gunmen, and then a scuffle. Apparently, the first intruder was fighting fiercely, and the gunman feared to shoot because of the racket their guns would make.

The fight swarmed out into the hallway. Jerry, halfway down the stairs now, had his camera raised. He waited until the struggling figures, seen faintly, were in the center of the hallway. Then he snapped the shutter.

Intense white light broke the darkness and the unexpectedness of this startled the three men so that they stopped fighting, without doubt, trying to readjust their eyes to the darkness. That flash had been blinding.

Something hit the stairs behind Jerry with a crash. The front door opened and one man went rushing out. The other two were silhouetted in the doorway for an instant, then both sped after the fleeing man.

"Did you see who they were?" Jerry asked.

"Me?" Chris replied. "I was blind as a bat when that doggone flash went off. I didn't see a thing."

"I guess I was ready for it," Jerry said. "The man who came in here first was Sam Cass. Turn on the lights. I think Cass threw something in my direction. He must have guessed, of course, that I was using a flash-gun."

After the lights went on, Jerry ran to the front door and closed it. He was sliding home a bolt as Chris came toward him carrying a paper-wrapped box. It was flat and of medium size.

Without pausing to open it, Jerry hurried into the living room and turned on more lights. A wall safe, concealed behind a sliding panel, yawned wide.

"I'm beginning to understand," Jerry said. "Sam Cass came here for something he was afraid to get before. Those two killers were probably after the same thing and trailed him here. He realized he might be killed or captured and threw this paper-wrapped box toward me. The crooks are still chasing him in the belief that he has it. I doubt they heard it crash against the steps, in the excitement."

"Open it," Chris said tensely. "Don't keep me in suspense like this. Maybe it's the jewelry—the real stuff."

"Feels more like a chunk of lead."

Jerry stripped off the paper and exposed a plain black cardboard container. Opening this, both of them stared at a .38 automatic pistol.

"What in the world?" Chris exclaimed.

Jerry removed the gun from the box and ejected a cartridge clip. He pulled back the magazine and another slug shot out. Jerry held the gun toward the light and peered through the barrel.

"Jerry," Chris clutched his arm, "that's the gun Willoughby used to kill himself! It was hidden in his safe by the man who wanted to make that look like murder."

"There's only one thing against that theory, darling. This particular gun hasn't been fired for months. The mechanism is rusted, but one shot was discharged from it. Fired, maybe a year or two ago."

"What does it mean?" Chris asked.

"I have an idea," Jerry said. "Sergeant Orr has a bullet that was taken from the body of a murdered man. It's

the same caliber and if it matches, I'll know a lot more about this case."

"We'd better get out of here," Chris suggested. "What if those two men come back!"

"That's right," Jerry agreed. "If they catch Sam Cass and see that he no longer has the package, they'll be back after it. Let's go."

Both started toward the door and, fortunately, Jerry was close to the light switch when a front window was shattered by a kick. He dived toward the switch, snapped off the light, and dropped floorward.

Chris, who had preceded him and was in the hall, thought fast, too. She managed to extinguish the hall lights and now the house was in pitch darkness.

"Wade!" a voice called out. "Hey—Wade! You can't get away! The back door is guarded and I'm covering the front. Throw that package through the window I smashed. Otherwise, I'll come and get it—and I'll come shooting!"

Jerry put his lips close to Christine's ear.

"Sneak to the kitchen and try to stop the other rat from getting in. We'll be cornered if he makes it. If he does get in and you can't stop him, hide somewhere, slip out when you can and get help. Watch out for the guy. He's armed and he'll shoot."

"But they'll kill you, Jerry!" Chris whispered anxiously. "I'd rather stay—"

"And have both of us killed? Beat it as soon as you have a chance. Get help and I'll try to stall these birds off."

There was a flash of flame from the broken front window. Jerry pulled Chris flat as a bullet smashed into the wall above their heads. The killer had heard them whispering and had fired blindly at the sound of their voices. Jerry gave Chris a nudge. She crawled across the hall and disappeared into the darkness of the dining room.

"The next one," came a grim warning, "will put you underground, Wade. Don't be a fool. You've got nothing to gain by helping Sam Cass."

Jerry managed to wriggle behind a big chair. Propped against the wall, he unlimbered his leather carrying case which contained the candid camera, two more spare flash-bulbs and various filters and lenses.

There was also a device which could be attached to the camera; a shutter release squeezed, and thirty seconds would elapse before the camera clicked. It was used mainly by a photographer who wanted to take a picture of himself and the device gave him time to set the camera and pose before it.

Jerry got this in place, purely by sense of feel. But he knew cameras and everything that went with them, as a machine-gunner knows his weapon. Jerry knew he couldn't stall much longer, now that the gunman already had opened fire.

"Wade," the crook called again. "Do as I direct or I'll kill the girl, too! So help me, after I've blasted you, she'll get it! That's a promise."

Jerry made no sound, busy crawling from behind his big chair to a point halfway down the long living room. He reached out and seized the leg of a straight-backed chair and pulled it into position.

The gunman heard the scraping sound and fired. A piece of the chair leg hit Jerry's cheek and drew blood. He wiped it away and continued moving the chair to the spot where he wanted it.

He worried about Chris. She wouldn't leave unless there was nothing else she could do and Jerry realized the strategy these two killers were using. While one kept Jerry's attention, the other was stealing into the house through the rear.

Jerry was trapped and he only hoped Chris would hide until she could quietly slip away.

JERRY set the camera on the chair seat, aiming it at the broken front window. Everything was set. He crawled slightly to the left, but stayed within reach of the chair.

Then he spoke.

"You can't get away with this! You can't see me either, but I've got something here that can see you. If I'm killed, there'll be a beautiful picture for the jury, showing you firing at me. One more shot and I'll—"

"Take my picture," the gunman broke in derisively. "Yeah, I know. All you do is take pictures. Listen, dope, after I put a bullet through your head, I'll send another through the camera. Then I'll get the girl. This is your last chance!"

Do as I say! Throw me the package Cass left here or—"

Jerry reached over and touched the automatic shutter control. Then he quickly crawled away from the spot. As he did, he got the box out of his pocket and extracted the automatic which Sam Cass had taken from Willoughby's safe. It was loaded and, old as it was, ready for action.

The timing device tripped the shutter and the flash-bulb. Jerry, prepared for this, had his eyes fastened on the front window. The brilliant light illuminated Chris' "good-looking crook" who had his gun leveled. The killer fired straight at the camera.

As he did, Jerry's gun roared. A scream answered him, then the killer fell. Jerry heard him trying to crawl away. Jerry, gun ready, rushed toward the front door. He was prepared in case the second killer tried to intercept him, but there were no signs of the man.

CHAPTER X

LIMELIGHT OF TRUTH



HASTILY Jerry got the front door open. The crook, lying on the porch, made one weak attempt to raise his gun, but Jerry kicked it out of his hand and rapidly searched the man. Then he left him there. The crook was too badly hurt to get away.

Jerry turned on the hall lights. He went through the dining room, slowed up at the kitchen door and called Christine's name. He waited about half a second and then hurled himself at the swinging door.

It was dawn. Light filtered through the kitchen windows and he almost bowled over Chris. She was seated on top of the crook who had meant to take the place from the rear. In one hand was an efficient-looking rolling pin and the crook's head was bloody.

"Come in," Chris invited. "I'm baking a cake. And whoever said a good old-fashioned rolling pin isn't a woman's best weapon?"

"Chris!" Jerry gasped.

"He was trying to open a window when I entered the kitchen," Chris explained. "He didn't see me, but I saw this rolling pin so I just waited until he

poked his head inside. Then I lambasted him. Pretty good job, don't you think? How did you do?"

Jerry suddenly pivoted and raced through the house. On his way into the living room he snapped on lights, then sank slowly into a chair. His camera was intact, but two inches above it, a nick had been gouged out of the chair.

A muted siren announced the arrival of police. In a moment Sergeant Orr and several men stormed up on the porch, and on into the kitchen at a word from the Candid Camera Kid. Orr's men took possession of Christine's prisoner and an ambulance was sent for.

Back on the front porch, Sergeant Orr arose from examining the crook Jerry had shot.

"If you'd put that slug two inches farther to the right, you'd have blasted his heart," Orr grunted. "And how come the Candid Camera Kid is lugging a roscoe?"

"Come inside," Jerry said. "You didn't get here a minute too soon. Did somebody report the shooting?"

"I did," Chris said proudly. "There was a telephone in the kitchen. After I conked my friend, I invited Sergeant Orr over for the party."

When the two prisoners had been taken away, Jerry, Chris and Sergeant Orr proceeded to his office in a police car. There Jerry went to work at once. He wadded thick pieces of old garments into a compact mass and fired a bullet from the automatic into it. By carefully unfolding the cloth he found the slug.

A quick trip to the police laboratories upstairs and Jerry sat down behind a double microscope. He placed the bullet he had fired on one slide and beside it the slug which had been taken from the body of a jeweler named Bryant—the victim of a killing that had never been solved.

ADJUSTING the screw, he studied these two slugs, then got up.

"Take a look, Sarge. They came from the same gun, all right."

"Okay," Orr said. "But what does it mean?"

"Willoughby had the gun which killed Bryant months ago. He kept it in his safe. Willoughby also wrote those anonymous notes which tipped off people who had been gypped."

"Why?" Orr said.

"He committed suicide," Jerry said. "I've got the proof of that now. Why? Because Willoughby murdered Bryant."

"What?" Orr shouted. "How'd you ever arrive at such a conclusion as that?"

"I'm guessing," Jerry admitted. "But it must be that. Someone knew Willoughby had committed that murder and blackmailed him. When Willoughby manufactured and sold those extremely valuable jewelry pieces he always insisted on his customers taking them out for appraisal, which they did. But he always left some little thing undone—a clasp to be added to a necklace, a pin to a brooch. The customers always had to bring the gems back. When they did Willoughby substituted the fake for the real thing."

Orr whistled. "It makes sense, but I never figured Willoughby for a crook."

"He wasn't. They had him against a wall. Don't you see, Sarge? Sam Cass arrived at Mrs. Wonacott's house and saw me getting ready to take pictures of the gems. He knew the camera would show the gems up as fakes. That's why he left in such a hurry."

"Wait until I get my hands on him!" Orr grumbled.

"Sam Cass telephoned Willoughby," Jerry went on. "Willoughby realized the game was up. He wanted to do the right thing so he wrote those notes and had someone mail them. Probably Sam Cass. Then Willoughby shot himself. The man who forced him to substitute those gems also learned about my taking pictures of them and he went to Willoughby's house to find out if there was any danger of the truth being discovered."

"He found Willoughby dead—a suicide. He realized this would implicate him when we searched for a reason why Willoughby should have shot himself, so he rearranged for it to be made to look like murder. Then he hurried back to Mrs. Wonacott's house. Probably he peered through a window and saw me hand Mike Brody the film and knew what that meant."

"When Mike left the house, the killer ran him down and one of those assistants we just captured jumped out of the car and took the roll of film from Mike's pocket. That accomplished, the murderer decided to sacrifice some of the

gems and he slipped into Mrs. Wonacott's house and exchanged the real gems for the fakes. He had no idea that those anonymous notes would be sent out and he figured the whole thing would blow over, with me put down as a rotten appraiser of gems."

"Let's go back to my office," Orr said. "I'll make those two mugs talk. Though maybe you know who the killer is."

"I don't—yet," Jerry answered. "And speaking of the appraisers, the killer did his best to throw the blame on them, even sacrificing more of the gems to establish their guilt."

"But, Jerry," Chris asked, "why didn't he get rid of those jewels instead of keeping them so long?"

"How could he?" Jerry replied. "They were especially cut stones and worth only a fraction of their real value if they were cut. I'll give you odds the murderer hoped to keep them until after the war was over, Europe prosperous again—or South America. Then he'd sell the stuff there."

"The duplicate gems were works of art. Nobody but Willoughby could have created them. Their owners were satisfied, the jewels would have passed even a careful examination, and when they were finally found to be phony so much time would have passed that the whole issue would have been confused."

THEY stepped into Sergeant Orr's office and Sam Cass smiled at them wanly. There was dried blood on his shirt, more on his temples.

"I just barely made it," he said. "Those two killers shot me—twice. I jumped out of the car. They thought I was dead, I suppose, and left me when they found I didn't have what they wanted. I may pass out and before I do, I want you to know the truth."

"We already know most of it," Jerry said. "Get a doctor, Sarge. He's badly hurt."

"You got the gun?" Cass asked.

"We just finished comparing a slug fired from it with a bullet found in the body of a man named Bryant."

"Yes, Willoughby killed Bryant. Bryant tried to make Willoughby agree to a colossal gyp. Willoughby was to palm off phonies and send his customers to Bryant for appraisal of the stuff. Bryant would pass it as genuine."

Chris held a glass of water to his lips and Cass drank gratefully.

"Willoughby threatened to turn Bryant over to the police. There was a fight. Bryant drew a gun and in the struggle Willoughby shot him. Then another man entered the picture. I don't know who he is. Willoughby refused to tell me. This man told him he'd go to the chair if he didn't obey orders. Willoughby believed him, and agreed. That's when the crooked business started."

"You mailed the anonymous notes?" Jerry asked.

"Yes, Willoughby made me swear to if anything happened to him. He also instructed me to turn the gun over to the police and tell the whole story. All he held back was the name of the biggest crook—the man who had blackmailed him."

"Sarge," Jerry said, "send for McCordle and Lloyd Hargrave. Get an ambulance for Sam Cass. He's too good a guy to suffer any more."

"Thanks." Cass managed a weak grin. "I wanted to tell about all this before, but I thought I could uncover the killer. Then it became too late. They had me under observation. Jerry, remember what I said at Mrs. Wonacott's? That I knew a gentleman when I saw one? I was right."

At twenty minutes of nine, McCordle arrived and Hargrave came soon after. Both were too curious to be indignant about being summoned to Police Headquarters again. Jerry laid the blown-up shot of the men who had kidnaped Chris on a table.

"I want both of you to look at this picture," he said. "It shows three men. Do either of you know any of them?"

Hargrave shook his head. "They are complete strangers to me."

McCordle whistled in amazement. "Do I know them? Say, those two well-dressed birds are among the best jewel thieves in the country. The good-looking one makes a specialty of getting rid of red-hot loot. Don't tell me you got those babies?"

"We've got 'em," Jerry said. "Both have been softened up and they'll talk soon. When the doctors finish patching them. Then we'll have the murderer who is behind this."

"I don't see Sam Cass around," McCordle said. "He was close to Wil-

loughby and could have worked hand in glove with him."

"He'll never get away," Sergeant Orr said. "I'll see to that. Okay—you two can go. Stick around your homes though. I might need you again."

"If we can help in any way," Hargrave said, "I'm sure Mr. McCordle and I will be available."

As they left, McCordle hurried ahead and yelled for a taxi. Hargrave walked away. He headed uptown at a moderate pace, stopped to buy some cigars and finally turned casually into his bank.

He took a key from his pocket, went downstairs to the safety deposit vaults and signed the register. A guard accompanied him to one of the bigger boxes.

"Thank you," Hargrave said. "That's all."

The guard touched the peak of his cap and walked away. Hargrave opened the box and extracted two large, heavily wrapped and sealed containers and smiled a trifle.

"Look pleasant, please," a voice said.

Hargrave jumped. A flash-gun went off and Jerry Wade had an excellent picture of a murderer preparing to flee with his loot.

Hargrave dropped both boxes and reached toward his hip pocket. Sergeant Orr and Jerry hit him simultaneously and he went down with a crash. One box burst open under the weight of Orr's big body. Sparkling gems went slithering on the smooth floor in all directions.

ORR closed handcuffs around Hargrave's wrists. Jerry Wade grinned, knowing that Christine was in a telephone booth outside, frantically yelling for the copy desk.

"You guessed right, Kid," Orr said with satisfaction.

"Why not?" Jerry said. "Hargrave had to keep those gems somewhere so they'd never be accidentally found. Willoughby's jewelry store was out of the question, so was Hargrave's personal safe at home. That left only a bank. It was easy to find out where Hargrave had a safety deposit vault and we let him go after the loot and convict himself."

"Hargrave knew that Mrs. Wonacott was bringing her jewels into the limelight. She phoned Willoughby about it,

but got Hargrave instead. That gave him time to set the stage. Sam Cass was suspicious, of course, and McCardle was doing his job in his usual sloppy fashion. When Sam Cass was cleared, I knew Hargrave had to be the man. So I had him brought to Headquarters and learn that his two assistants were under arrest. He knew they would talk and there was little time to make a getaway. He was bound to collect the jewels immediately."

Sergeant Orr's face was somber.

"Listen, Kid, I just happened to think of Mike Brody. Now I could have this whole place cleared and Hargrave might resist a little—"

"Take him away," Jerry said grimly. "He'll suffer more than Mike did. Look at him! His knees are shaking already. Say, I'll lay a little bet they wheel this guy to the chair."

Hargrave sagged against Orr. The burly sergeant jerked him erect.

"What do you think I am?" Orr demanded. "A sucker?"

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4. CLEAN BLADE in razor by loosening handle, then rinsing in hot water and shaking. Wiping the blade is likely to damage the edges



Marshall's fist lashed out as the stocky man reached for a gun

Treachery Trail

By LOUIS FALK

Mysteriously attacked by a thug in his own home, Bill Marshall finds himself fighting to save the girl he loves from plotters who seek a vital war secret!

SHADOWS lingered in the third floor hallway of the Greenwich Village apartment building. Bill Marshall stood in front of the door of 3B with the key to his apartment in his hand. He felt the old wariness stealing over him, the same feeling of impending danger he had experienced so many times during the past hectic years.

He had known it in Occupied France. It had been with him there on the island of Sumatra when he had fought his way through the jungle during long days and nights. Only because Bill Marshall sensed danger and was ready for it was he still alive.

"Must be a hangover from those places I've been," Marshall said softly. "There's no reason for me to

expect trouble here in New York."

Somewhere he heard rain beating on a roof. It was a mean night out. He had learned that in walking three long blocks from the subway to the apartment house. This weather wasn't any too good for a war correspondent who had been sent home after nearly dying from jungle fever.

He shrugged his shoulders and inserted the key in the lock. There was no reason for him to feel so cautious and wary. He was acting like an old maid with the jitters.

Marshall threw open the door. Blackness shrouded the living room. He stepped inside, fingers sliding along toward the light switch. Behind him the door swung shut and the latch clicked.

He pushed the light switch and stood motionless, staring. The man who stood beside the table with a gun in his hand looked like a gorilla dressed in a flashy suit.

"No matter what you are selling, I don't want any," said Marshall. "And don't tell me you are waiting for a street car."

"Kinda flip, ain't you, cousin," said the man beside the table. "But I ain't got time for chatter. Hand over the map and everything will be swell."

"What map?" Marshall looked at the automatic in the gorilla's hand and mentally cursed the fact he was not carrying a gun. "I haven't the faintest idea what you're talking about."

"Don't give me any malarky, cousin," snarled Gargantua's double. "Lefty Dawes don't fall for it, see. I came here to get the map, so hand it over, or else. We know the dame turned it over to you."

MARSHALL let his gaze roam casually around the living room. The telephone handset resting on the table against the wall was the nearest heavy object that he could see. If he could only get one good crack at Lefty Dawes with that phone! But the gun in his visitor's hand was held

too steady to consider any such foolish moves.

"I still don't know anything about any map," said Marshall. "And don't call me cousin. If I have simian relatives I'd rather not know about it."

Bill Marshall's arm was still extended toward the wall. He reached out and touched the light switch. Dawes cursed as the room was plunged into darkness. But to Marshall's surprise the human gorilla did not fire his automatic.

Marshall grabbed up the phone and gave a heavy yank that jerked the wire loose. He flung the handset in the direction of Dawes and heard a grunt and then a roar of rage. If the phone had hit Dawes it had only been a glancing blow.

A hand grabbed Marshall's arm. He smashed at the face of Dawes with his free left hand. It felt as though he had battered his knuckles against rock. Then pain shot through his body. Dawes had just missed his head with the automatic and had landed hard on his shoulder. Marshall reeled back, bumped against the table. It went over with a loud crash.

He was still off-balance as Lefty Dawes swung the steel barrel against his chin. He dropped to the floor with a thud. He was struggling to get to his feet as Dawes found the switch and turned on the lights.

"So you want to play rough," muttered Dawes. "All right, you been askin' for it, cousin."

Bill Marshall's eyes were fixed on the entrance of the apartment. The door to the outside hall had opened. A short, stocky, black-haired man stood there peering into the room through shell-rimmed glasses. He held a heavy cane in his right hand.

"My nerves," he muttered. "All this noise. Now really."

Lefty Dawes glanced over his shoulder at the stout man.

"It's all right—" Dawes began.

He never finished the sentence. The cane in the stout man's hand flashed up and crashed down on Dawes' head.

It fell with terrific force. His knees buckled and he dropped sprawling to the floor, knocked cold. As the automatic slid out of his hand, Marshall reached down and grabbed it.

"A burglar, Mr. Marshall?" asked the stocky man. He inspected the fallen man through the spectacles, then turned to the door and closed it gently. "Perhaps it is fortunate that I heard the disturbance."

"Who are you?" asked Marshall, as he dropped the gun into his pocket. For an instant his eyes rested on the closed door. "I guess it was a good thing you heard the noise."

"I'm one of your neighbors from across the hall," said the black-haired man. "The name is Douglas Colton. Ah, don't you think it might be advisable to turn this uncouth-looking individual over to the police? You might phone, you know."

"Not from here, I can't," said Marshall. "I pulled the phone wire out by the roots fighting with this man."

"And I haven't a phone, either," sighed Colton, and sank down into a chair. "Perhaps you had better go downstairs and see if you can find a policeman. I'll guard this intruder for you while you are gone. I'm afraid my health is too delicate for me to risk going out on a night like this."

Marshall hesitated for a moment, his gaze fixed on the unconscious man on the floor. Then he nodded. He walked over to a desk and picked up a miniature camera in a leather case and dropped it into his pocket.

"Some of the photographs you have taken in the various war zones have been quite remarkable, Mr. Marshall," said Colton quietly. "You always keep your camera with you?"

"Usually," answered Marshall, as he walked toward the door. "I'd hate to lose it." At the door he swung around and looked at Colton. "Dawes had the weird idea that I had some sort of important map in my possession. That's what he was after. He was mistaken. I know nothing of any maps."

"I'm sure you don't, Mr. Marshall." Douglas Colton nodded. "I hope you have no difficulty getting the police."

BILL MARSHALL stepped out into the hall, closing the door behind him. The lock automatically snapped into place from the inside. He glanced at it. Then a cryptic smile wreathed his face.

"Pass key, of course," he muttered as he went down the stairs.

When he reached the apartment house lobby he glanced at his wrist-watch and seated himself in a chair. He made no attempt to phone the police or hunt for a patrolman. Filling his pipe he sat there calmly smoking.

Twenty minutes passed. Marshall glanced up as a slender figure came in through the entrance door. He took a second look at the pretty dark-haired girl. Then he leaped to his feet with an exclamation of delight.

"Joan!" he exclaimed as she approached hastily. "Or should I say Lieutenant Dalton? That's your official rank as an army nurse, isn't it?"

"That's right," Joan Dalton nodded, a worried look in her blue eyes. "Oh, Bill, I'm glad to see you. So glad! I've had a terrible time since I left the Canal Zone. I hoped that I would find you here at the old place. You told me you would come back to the apartment when you were in New York, you know. I came to this place earlier in the evening, but you weren't in. So I waited in a drug store, then returned."

"What happened, Joan?" asked Marshall, leading her over to a bench at one side of the lobby. "Tell me about it."

"It all started just a few days before I left Cristobal," said Joan. "I had been given leave with a few other Army nurses. We were to return to New York and await further orders." She raised her dark head proudly. "We will be sent to one of the vital war zones in the Pacific, I suppose."

Bill Marshall nodded. He was watching the stairs, wondering if

Douglas Colton would come down. By this time Colton should be wondering why he had not returned with the police. Marshall was inclined to doubt that the stout little man would appear.

"But what happened?" asked Marshall as Joan paused.

"For two or three days I was conscious of being watched, of being followed, though I was never quite sure of it. I was staying at the hotel with some of the other girls. The night before we sailed the other girls went to a party given them by some officers. I was alone in the hotel room."

Again Joan paused as though she found it difficult to go on. Marshall smiled and took her hand in his and held it. She seemed to find comfort in his doing so.

"Go on, darling," he said softly. "Tell me the rest."

"I was tired and I had gone to bed. It was dark in the room. I heard the sound of someone creeping cautiously toward me. I tried to turn on the light. Before I could reach it a rag saturated with chloroform was thrust into my face and that was all I knew."

"How much money did you lose?" asked Marshall.

"That's the strange part of it," said Joan. "I had five hundred dollars in my purse and some jewelry. When I regained consciousness none of it was missing. I guess the burglar must have been frightened away before he

could steal anything."

"Might not have been a thief," Marshall said thoughtfully. "You weren't asked to bring back any papers that might be important to the Allied Nations, were you, Joan?"

"Papers?" Joan looked surprised. "Why no. I had nothing of that sort. Why do you ask?"

"I was just wondering about a map," said Marshall. "Did you notice anything unusual when you regained consciousness?"

"Only that there was a big torn place in my pajama coat as though someone had been examining my back," she said. "Why, I don't know. Have you any idea what it all means, Bill?"

Marshall hesitated before answering. He had been in love with Joan Dalton back in those days before the War. At the time she had seemed fond of him. He knew now that he still loved her, and he was sure that she was in grave danger. So was he, but he was used to that.

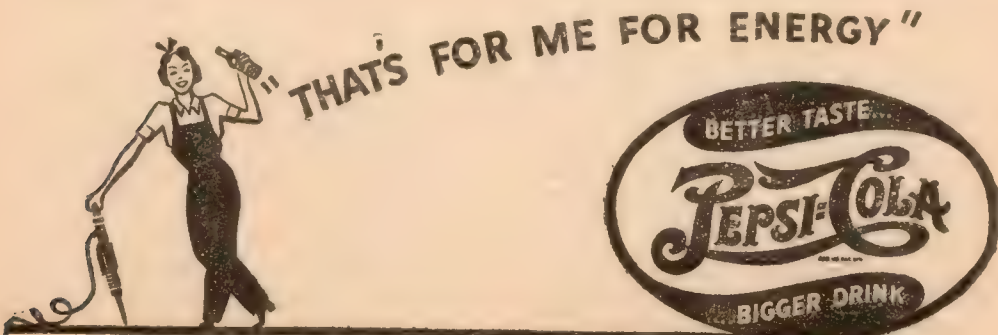
"Come on up to my apartment, darling," he said. "We can talk better there."

JOAN looked at him, her eyes shining. The fingers of the hand he still held tightened.

"That's twice you've called me 'darling'," she said. "Does it mean anything, Bill?"

"Everything, Joan," said Marshall

[Turn page]



as he rose to his feet and released her hand. "I'm still sold on one Joan Dalton. But come on upstairs."

They climbed the steps, passed the first floor, and then the second. Marshall frowned as he glanced up the staircase and found the third floor hall was in darkness. There was a light coming from the floor below. It enabled them to see their way up the stairs. But beyond that blackness shrouded everything.

For the last half hour Bill Marshall had sensed danger. Now it grew stronger. Yet when trouble did come, it came so abruptly he was caught unprepared.

He was ascending the stairs a little ahead of the girl. Within a few steps of the third floor landing, a heavy object came hurtling toward him. It struck him on the chest with such force that it knocked him backwards. He went tumbling down the stairs.

As he fell he heard Joan scream. Then his head thudded heavily against the edge of a step. Everything went black as he lapsed into unconsciousness.

He finally opened his eyes to find some of the tenants of the second floor of the building gathered around him. Someone talked about having sent for a doctor as Marshall struggled to his feet.

"I'm all right," he said. "Just bruised a little. No bones broken. I don't need a doctor." His eyes searched the faces of the people around him, seeking Joan and not finding her. "There was a young lady with me. Was she hurt?"

"There was no one but you lying out here in the hall when I heard a noise in the hall and came out," said a thin-faced man. "I didn't see any young lady. Maybe she went for a doctor."

"Probably," agreed Marshall, though he did not believe it. He glanced at a black leather suitcase lying close to where he had fallen. He felt sure this bag had knocked him down the stairs.

He picked it up and started up the

steps to his third floor apartment. The other tenants were drifting away now. The excitement was over. The light was again lit on his floor.

He reached the door of his apartment and found it locked. He unlocked it with his key and entered. The lights were on here also, and a quick look through the place told him that Douglas Colton and Lefty Dawes had gone. Nor was there any trace of Joan having been there.

Marshall placed the suitcase on a studio couch and examined it. The catches that held the suitcase closed were not locked and he had no trouble opening the bag. He discovered it contained a few telephone directories. That was what made it so heavy.

There was a little pocket in the lining of the bag. He reached in and drew out a folded bit of paper. It was a rent receipt dated the previous month and made out to Douglas Colton. The address was that of another apartment house in the village.

"Careless on the part of my dear friend, Mr. Colton," said Marshall. "But I'm grateful to him for the information. He didn't leave me holding an empty bag."

Marshall was still wearing his raincoat and he had picked up the hat which had fallen from his head when he had been hit by the suitcase and knocked down the stairs. He still had Dawes' automatic in his pocket.

He left the apartment, went down to the street and hailed a taxi. He gave the address he had found on the rent receipt. It was still raining and the streets were dark and bleak because of the dim-out.

The cab drew up in front of a building on Jane Street. Bill Marshall paid the driver and got out. He entered the dingy lobby of a walk-up and searched the mailboxes until he found the name D. Colton.

"Thought so," he said softly. "That business of Colton saying he was a neighbor of mine across the hall was what tipped me off in the first place. I happen to know the name of every

tenant on the third floor in my apartment house."

HE FOUND that Colton's apartment was on the second floor. Climbing the stairs, he walked along the hall until he reached the door. He hesitated, then grinned and rang the bell. After a few moments the door opened and the stout man stood there looking at him.

"Why—why, Mr. Marshall," stammered Colton, obviously startled at sight of his visitor. "This is a surprise."

"I'm sure it must be," Marshall said grimly. He stepped into the apartment, closing the door behind him. "You live in a lot of places, don't you, Colton."

"I, ah, moved," said Colton weakly. "Couldn't stand the noise at the other place. Besides when you left me alone with that brutal-looking individual so long I—I became frightened."

"Stop lying!" Marshall's tone was harsh. "Where is she? What have you done with Joan Dalton?"

"Joan Dalton!" exclaimed Colton. "I don't know what you are talking about. I haven't the faintest idea of any such person's whereabouts."

Marshall sighed as he slipped out of his raincoat and tossed it aside. He noticed that Colton was no longer wearing his glasses. The stout man's face looked harder without them.

"You're going to talk, and talk fast," snapped Marshall.

His fists lashed out, caught Colton on the chin and sent him reeling back as the stocky man reached into his pocket for a gun. Before Colton could recover Marshall hit him again. The stout man cursed viciously in a foreign tongue. A paper dropped from his pocket and fluttered to the floor.

For the third time Marshall landed a heavy blow. Colton struck against a washstand and the water pitcher dropped to the floor. Colton was almost crying with pain and rage.

Marshall reached down and picked up the paper the stocky man had

dropped. He unfolded it and saw it was a radiogram sent from Cristobal to Douglas Colton. It read:

USE FORMULA TEN-FORTY ON BACK

J. L. SMITH

Again Colton reached for his gun, but Marshall stopped that with his automatic. He kept the stout man covered as he spoke.

"You made quite a few mistakes," Marshall said. "First by thinking Miss Dalton delivered the map when she called at my place early this evening. Obviously you sent Dawes to get the map from me by strong arm methods. Evidently you didn't know just how Miss Dalton was bringing the map from the Canal Zone until you got this radiogram."

"I don't know what you are talking about," protested Colton.

"Shut up and let me finish," snapped Marshall. "Then you came into my apartment and knocked Dawes out before he could talk and give away the fact you two were working together. But I knew it was a trick when I realized you had entered my apartment with a pass key."

He moved toward Colton menacingly with the fist of his left hand upraised, the automatic still in his right. The stout man shrank back with a whimper, fear in his eyes.

"Where is she? Where is Miss Dalton?" demanded Marshall. "Tell me."

"Right in the next room, cousin," said Dawes' voice behind him as the gorilla-like man appeared with a gun in his hand. "And you'd better drop that automatic if you want to live."

Marshall turned. As he did so, he hooked his foot in the handle of the water pitcher that had been knocked to the floor. He gave a kick and the pitcher went flying through the air to hit Lefty Dawes squarely in the face. The force of it knocked him unconscious and he fell with a thud.

Bill Marshall swung as Colton leaped at him. He landed a hard left to Colton's chin and the stout man dropped to the floor, out cold. Joan

appeared in the doorway of the next room, her hair mussed and her eyes wild. Her dress had been torn down the back.

"Bill!" she exclaimed. Then she saw Marshall standing there with the automatic in his hand and the two other men on the floor. "Oh, darling, I'm so glad you got here!"

"Turn around Joan," Marshall said quietly.

SHE turned and he saw the map that had evidently been painted on her back that night in the Canal Zone by some sort of invisible ink. It was important information regarding the position of the big ships of the U. S. Fleet.

"I thought so," said Marshall. "You've got a map painted on your back, Joan."

"I know," she nodded. "I heard them talking as they tore open the back of my dress and worked on my skin with some sort of chemical they called Formula Ten-forty. It revealed the map. They were going to kill me after that horrible fat man had made

a copy of the map. He said he had a man trailing me ever since I sailed from the Canal Zone."

Marshall nodded grimly. Then an expression of relief passed over his face as the door burst open and two policemen appeared.

"You'll have to stop this noise—" began one of the officers, and then he broke off. "Leaping blazes! What is this—murder?"

"No, Officer," said Marshall. "We just caught a couple of fifth columnists, that's all."

"Good!" said the patrolman. "With me having five sons in the Service, nothing suits me better than turning in some of them fifth columnists." He glanced at his fellow officer. "And I'm betting that O'Hara here feels the same way about it."

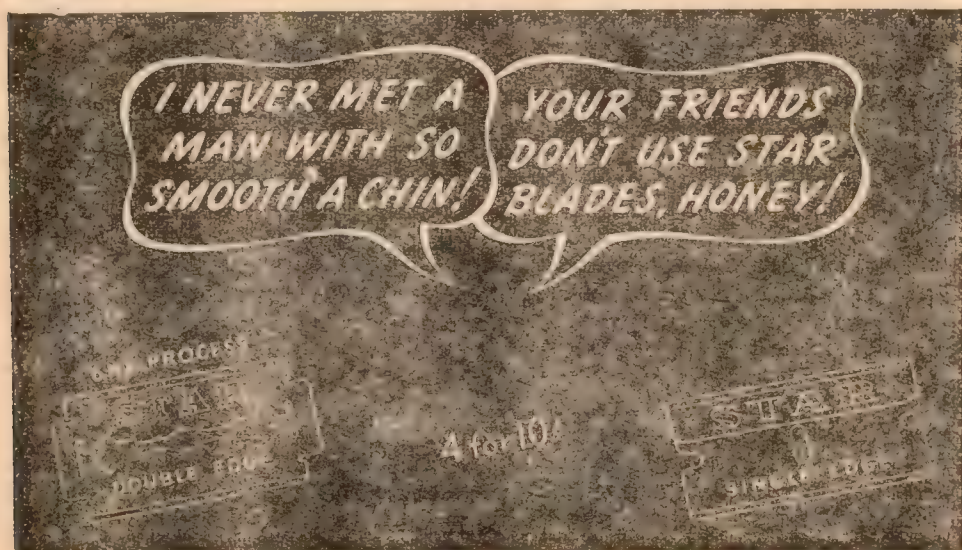
"I do," said O'Hara.

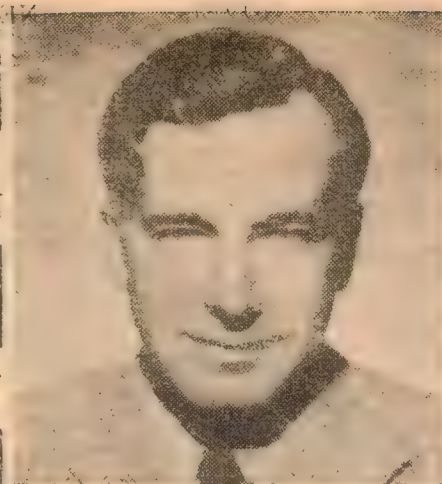
"Remember Officer O'Hara's words, Joan," said Marshall. "I expect you to say them to a minister as soon as we can get the license and all."

"What words?" asked Joan, her eyes shining.

"Why, 'I do'," Marshall said.

Coming Soon: APPOINTMENT WITH MURDER, an Exciting Complete
Candid Camera Kid Novel by JOHN L. BENTON





DAVID MANNERS



Want to Help a Soldier's Morale?

By DAVID MANNERS

Famous Novelist and Motion Picture Star

I HAVE just received a letter from a flying lieutenant of the Navy Air Force who has been in nearly every action in the South Pacific since the beginning of the war. He writes:

"The great gap between the men overseas and the people at home seems to lie in their respective understanding of war. Most of us out here feel that the people back home are still going along in a state of unawareness, thinking mostly of their personal difficulties, their rationing of gasoline and sugar and how to get higher wages.

"Can't you do something to help people know we must feel they are with us, working for us, sacrificing gladly, backing our job in every way? Otherwise, what reason have we to carry on? Keep our country safe for selfishness and greed and easy living? If we are to win this war, we must be assured the people back home are playing their part in it too, that they believe in us and the necessity for us to kill and be killed. And it must be more than a verbal assurance. It must be proved in actions.

"You say you are inspired by the news of heroism and fortitude in the armed forces. Does it occur to the home folks that we get a

great lift and a new will to carry on to our utmost when we hear of cooperation and personal sacrifices at home? . . ."

Are the author of this letter and his fellow fliers to read in newspapers from home that war bond sales are lagging? Can you imagine the effect upon morale such news must have?

Your government does not ask you to give your dollars. It merely asks you to lend your dollars. It promises to give you your dollars back plus interest. It is asking you to invest in the business of supplying food and arms to the young men who are called upon to do the dirty work in your war.

It IS your war and my war for the right to live and think and speak and write as free beings. It is our war for survival. It is little enough that we share in the responsibility of lending every available cent for victory. It is the first and least duty of every intelligent man and woman to see that those chaps out there have our practical support as well as our fine words and our prayers.

INVEST IN VICTORY! Your money invested in **your** country can help to win **your** war. Invest your dollars and dimes in **U. S. WAR BONDS AND STAMPS!**

A WAR BOND MESSAGE FOR ALL AMERICANS

*Jack Spencer, American consular agent,
discovers that there are wheels within
wheels in the Nazi spy mind when
he undertakes the guardianship
of a repatriated group bound
for an exchange vessel*



Spencer turned the victim over — Fraser's throat had been ripped from ear to ear!



Those present at the bloody sight, set up yells

LAST TRAIN TO FREEDOM

By NORMAN A. DANIELS

CHAPTER I

MURDER IN THE LION'S CAGE

THERE was a barrier across the road marking the boundaries between Occupied and Unoccupied France. It was dawn and a single cart lumbered toward the Nazi guards who eyed it sleepily.

The cart was driven by a white-whiskered old Frenchman who wore tattered trousers, shoes that were bound with pieces of cloth and a smock which had once been light blue, but now presented a bedraggled, washed-out appearance.

In the rear of the cart was green truck, raised on French farms for the

consumption of the invaders. The cart was piled high with it and the German guards approached with fixed bayonets.

"*Bonjour!*" The farmer waved a hand and smiled. "The lieutenant is awake, *oui?*"

One soldier went to the rear of the cart and methodically pawed through the produce. Those portions of the cart which he could not reach were investigated by means of his bayonet. He grunted, satisfied that the cart contained no hidden passenger.

The driver lifted a heavy basket, covered with cloth, got off the cart and winked at the German soldiers. They all entered the shack which was used as

A COMPLETE MYSTERY NOVEL

quarters for the men on guard duty. A lieutenant welcomed the old man with a shout.

The old man lifted the cloth from his basket and exposed five bottles of good wine. The lieutenant took up a collection from his men, paid the Frenchman in francs and ordered five more bottles his next trip around.

"We do not reach town often," the lieutenant explained. "Not once have we been able to buy the wine of France. Never—except from someone like you who does not mind dealing with Germans."

The old man clinked the coins in his hand.

"Why should I mind, *Messieurs*? Money is money. *Le bon Dieu* knows we need it these days. Next week I come again, eh?"

He stepped out of the shack. There were two carts standing there now, in front of the barrier. Two soldiers went to the second one and began searching it also. The one thing those Germans did not notice was that those two carts were identical in appearance and carried approximately the same kind of produce.

The old man clambered onto the cart nearest him, waved a farewell and clucked his horse into activity. The barrier was raised and the cart lumbered on.

TWENTY minutes later, the old man laid down the reins, turned in his seat and hammered against the side of the cart.

"*Mon ami*, it is now safe to come out."

Some of the produce was rolled aside and a red-headed, eager-eyed young man sat up. He slowly massaged his arm muscles.

"Thanks, Pierre," he said. "I still don't quite know how you did it, but the plan certainly worked."

Pierre shrugged. "It was simple *mon ami*. These pigs of Boches see only what is directly before their eyes."

The young man climbed onto the seat. Pierre hauled out another smock and a battered old hat. When the young man had donned these he looked like a typical French peasant.

"Don't kid yourself," he said in French idiom approximating the American slang. "The Boche are smart. As clever as they are ruthless. That's why

I know you pulled a fast one. What happened?"

Pierre grinned. "Always I bring wine to the Boche guards. They allow me to enter their shack, but only after I watch them search my cart. While I keep their attention inside, another cart draws up. One similar to mine, *comprenez*? The driver simply moves from his cart to mine. When the Boche search again, it is the same cart they have already searched, while I continue across the border with whatever I am bringing. Sometimes it is guns or bombs. Sometimes men who wish to return to Paris. Men like you, *M'sieu*. Though I cannot see why anyone in his right mind would want to go to Paris these days."

"I'm on a rather important mission," the young man said. "My name is Jack Spencer. I'm an American."

"Ah, *bien*. You go, perhaps, to pave the way for invasion?"

"No—not quite yet, Pierre, and it will take many more men than just me. I work for the United States Government as a consular clerk out of Vichy. We received a tip that all remaining Americans in Paris are to be arrested."

"But I thought they were all interned long ago," Pierre commented.

"No. There are nearly two thousand Americans loose in Paris. Men too old for active military duty. Women and children, too. Seems Brazil has been rounding up a lot of Nazi people and Germany wants to retaliate. There are few Brazilians so they're going to pick on Americans."

Pierre wagged his old head solemnly from side to side.

"War is a bad thing, *M'sieu*. An evil thing, for it hits not only men, but everyone. Those Americans—I feel sorry for them. They will be put in a concentration camp."

"Not if I reach them first," Jack Spencer said. "We'll arrange some way to get them over the border. Two miles ahead is a railroad station. I have a passport that doesn't identify me as a consular official, but I can get through with it. Drop me there, Pierre, and many thanks."

The train ride to Paris was monotonously long, with stops at every village on the way. The cars were packed with Nazi soldiers, but none paid any attention to Jack Spencer.

It was dark when the train puffed into the Paris station. Spencer got off and started walking toward one of the exits. Two men in Gestapo uniforms saw him. They held a brief conversation and then a shouted command brought Spencer to a halt.

"Your papers," one of the Gestapo men said curtly.

SPENCER handed over his passport. The Gestapo man glanced at it, shoved the passport into his pocket and took a firm grip on Jack Spencer's arm.

"American, eh? You are under arrest. All Americans in Paris are under arrest. Come with us."

Spencer groaned. He was too late, and even worse was the fact that he was under arrest, too. He was of military age and liable to be treated like any prisoner of war. In Occupied France or the concentration camps of Germany, such a prospect was not pleasing.

They bundled him into a military car and it was driven across Paris straight toward a big park which was noted for its large zoo. The car stopped in front of a concrete building and Jack Spencer was hauled out.

There were guards all around the building and from inside he could hear muffled voices. His eyes caught the concrete bars relief of a lion.

"What is this?" he asked in German. "Why am I being forced into the lion house of a zoo?"

"Because the monkey house is already filled." One Gestapo man laughed harshly. "Therefore, we throw you to the lions. Get inside or shall I boot you?"

Spencer stepped through the door and it was instantly slammed shut. He stood there in complete darkness, yet aware that a large number of people were around him.

"Yank?" someone finally asked.

"You bet I'm a Yank!" Spencer said. "A doggone sore one, too. Will somebody tell me what this is all about?"

"Welcome, Daniel," the voice said.

"Daniel?" Spencer frowned. "My name is Jack Spencer. I—"

"We're all Daniels in here," several voices assured him, and there was laughter. "Daniels in a lion's den."

As if in answer, there was a mighty roar from the rear of the building. Spencer gulped.

"Don't tell me there are real lions in here?" he demanded. "We're not locked up like a few hundred pounds of hamburger?"

Two or three matches were scraped and Spencer saw where he was. About eighty people were packed in the rather narrow passageway between big cages. Typical American humor pervaded and the consular clerk succumbed to it also.

A man of about fifty stepped up with outstretched hand.

"I'm Ted Tannen," he said. "Perfumes are—were—my business. The Germans have pinched every American in Paris. Imagine them being afraid of old ducks like me? Or of women like those locked up here with us? That's not all, either. Another hundred are decorating the big monkey cage, but they don't have the entertainment we're provided with."

Darkness settled again. Jack Spencer moved forward.

"You mean that lion, I suppose. I notice he is penned up in another cage at the rear of this corridor. Are you sure the bars will keep him back?"

"Don't worry." Tannen grinned. "We were put in here while it was still daylight and I examined those bars—when the lion let me get close enough. Take it from me, he's a hungry lion."

Spencer grunted. "Except for the Boche, there isn't a man, woman, child or beast in all of France who isn't hungry."

Tannen lit another match, studying Spencer. He whistled softly.

"You're young. How in the world did you stay out of their clutches this long? My partner—Ed Fraser—is just past fifty-seven and they almost tossed him into one of their concentration camps. Wait—let's find Ed. He'll be glad to meet a stranger."

TANNEN yelled the name of his partner. A voice came from far to the rear of the lion house. It was suddenly cut short by a wild scream that made everyone grow rigid with terror. On the heels of this scream came a savage snarl from the lion.

Spencer started elbowing his way through the packed crowd. Tannen stayed right behind him. They cleared the frightened prisoners. Spencer felt in his pocket and fished out a lighter.

He snapped the little wheel and a small flame sprang up.

Holding this high, he and Tannen slowly approached the cage where a lion eyed them malevolently. On the floor, in front of that cage, lay a huddled heap. Blood was slowly forming a miniature river. The lion thrust a paw through the bars and made a pass at the figure and set up another series of snarls.

"That's Ed—Ed Fraser!" Tannen gasped. "The cursed lion killed him! No—it was the Nazis who did it, curse them! They killed him."

"Hold this lighter," Jack Spencer said. "He may not be dead. Watch the lion and yell if he starts anything."

He dropped prone and wriggled closer toward the sprawled-out figure. He stretched one arm, secured a grip on Fraser's ankle and gently pulled him away. The lion bellowed savagely and tried to reach its victim with a bloody paw.

Spencer turned the victim over and grimaced. Tannen instantly shut off the lighter. What they had seen was not pleasant to look upon. Fraser's throat had been ripped from ear to ear!

CHAPTER II PRISON HOTEL



ENOUGH of those present had had glimpses of the bloody corpse to set up yells. Doors opened, rifle-armed guards came in and lights were turned on. A cocky lieutenant swaggered into the midst of the group, demanding silence in English, which he understood.

He saw Ed Fraser's body and cried out sharply. He rushed over to the man on the floor.

Jack Spencer stood beside him. The German looked up.

"He is dead," he said to Spencer. "The lion did this, I suppose. Look—the lion's paw. It is bloody. This foolish American went too close to the cage. It was his fault, do you understand? You were warned to stay away from the cage. We Germans are not responsible."

"You locked us up here," Spencer accused. "You put out the lights. You left that lion close enough to do damage. Now you say this isn't your fault. More colossal Nazi nerve, if you ask me. You

might as well have stood Fraser up against a wall and shot him."

The Nazi lieutenant arose, his face grim.

"It is best you are careful what you say!" he shouted at the top of his lungs. "Perhaps it will be a wall at sunrise for the lot of you. But we Germans do not want you killed by a lion. If you are so stupid as not to stay away from the cage, it is your fault. However, I shall arrange that all of you be taken to more comfortable quarters."

As quickly as it could be managed they were all on a military truck, rolling across peaceful-looking country that showed no scars of war. Jack Spencer was jammed between Ted Tannen and a woman of about thirty-eight who identified herself as Anita Clark.

"I think I know where they are taking us," Spencer said. "We just passed through Moisdon. That means we're still in Occupied France, but not far from the Border. There's a resort hotel a couple of miles ahead. I'll bet we'll be held there and when arrangements are made, we'll be shipped to Lisbon."

"For a return trip home?" Anita Clark asked without eagerness. "Mr. Spencer, do you think they'll exchange us for German prisoners being held in the United States and Brazil?"

"Exactly," Spencer nodded. "You'll notice they didn't even take me to a camp. That means they need every one of us to get their own people back. You don't seem to enjoy the prospect, Anita."

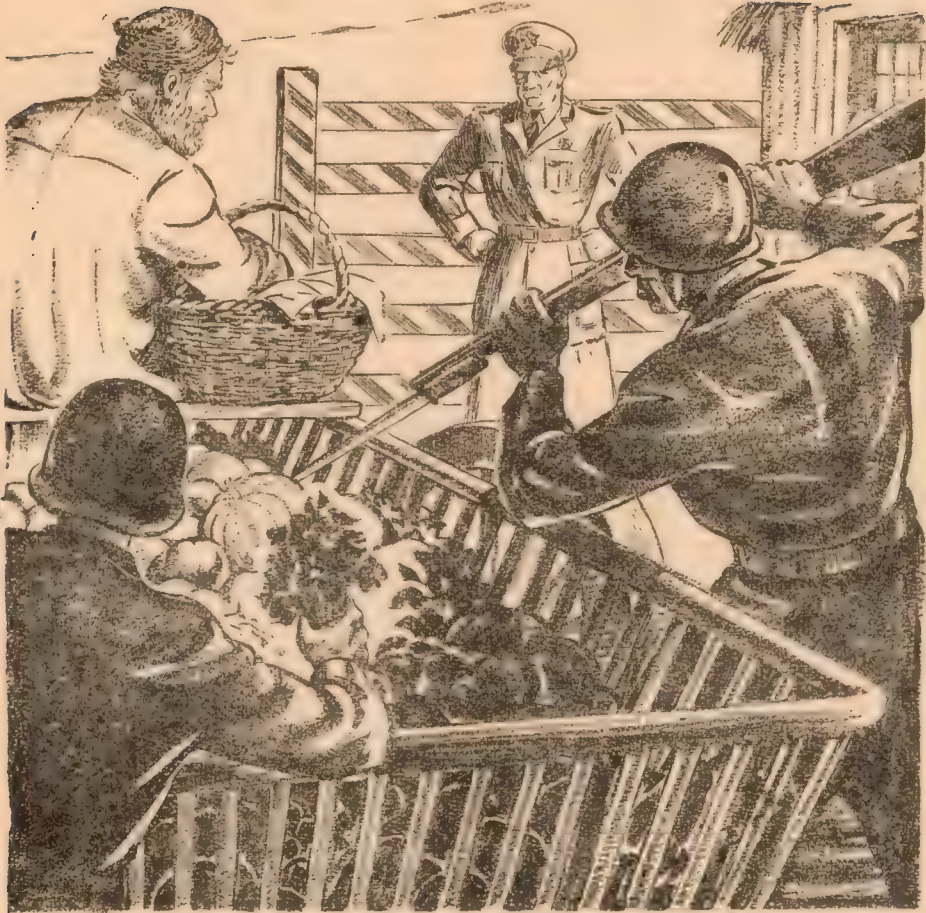
"I don't," she said softly. "You see, I'm married to a Frenchman. He was injured during the fighting and isn't arrested. I'd been hoping I could find some way to get him out of the country—and now I have to leave him. I may never see him again. He won't know what's happened to me. Here—I'll show you his picture."

She opened her purse and took out a pair of small photographs. Her husband was a nice-looking man. Anita was also in the picture.

"We had them taken for passport use," she explained. "In those days we had hope. Now it's all gone."

Ted Tannen put a friendly hand on her shoulder.

"We all have troubles these days, Anita," he said soberly. "Ed Fraser would have given his right arm for a



The German soldier investigated the cart by means of his bayonet

chance to go back to civilization. We talked about what we'd do when we got to New York together. I'll be glad to get there, but it won't be the same without Ed."

The truck made a violent turn. It passed through gates and climbed a steep driveway toward a homey-looking hotel on top of a hill.

"I was right," Spencer said. "This is the hotel I referred to. The death of Fraser must have scared the Nazis into providing us with good quarters."

ALL the trucks stopped and the Americans hopped off, stretching their legs with considerable gusto until guards swarmed up and they were brought into line. An infantry captain addressed them—also in English.

"You will be quite comfortable here," he said arrogantly. "In a short time, arrangements will have been made to exchange you for Germans being held in Brazil and the United States." While you are here, it is permitted to take walks along the paths, but do not leave them. The fence around these premises is charged with high voltage. I would not advise anyone to try to escape."

Tannen let out a laugh. "Imagine, telling us not to try to escape. Captain, if you offered me fifty thousand dollars, I'd still stay here and wait until we're sent to Lisbon."

"Silence!" the captain roared. "You will remain within doors after dinner. Anyone found outside will be shot immediately. No radios, of course, no newspapers, and no talk about the war."

"We get it," Jack Spencer said.

"That is good because from now on, you are under the control of the Gestapo. There is a new unit in Moisdon. I cannot guarantee how they will feel toward enemies of the Reich. Brandt, who will head this unit, is not noted for his kindness. That is my warning. Now select your own rooms."

The hotel was without heat and everyone pulled coats close as they went off in search of a place to sleep.

Dinner consisted of some soup that tasted on the dish-water side. There was a sausage apiece and none of the weenies suffered from obesity. Potatoes were black around the edges and matched the color of the bread.

After dinner, Jack Spencer sat down beside Anita Clark. He had four cigarettes, broke one in half and offered her this. He lit it and they puffed slowly.

"There is something rotten in France and it's Germans," he said in a low voice. "Ed Fraser wasn't killed by that lion. He was murdered—or had you guessed that?"

"No—no," she said tremulously. "I never gave it a thought. What makes you think it was murder?"

"Locking us up in a zoo was a typical German gesture, but there isn't a zoo in all France that has a single animal left. Lions, especially, were killed when the war began. In a bombing raid, lions might get loose and create panic. That lion was brought there from some remote zoo with the express purpose of fashioning an excuse for the murder of Ed Fraser."

Anita gasped. "But why should they murder him? The Boche usually kill those they don't like and call it military necessity."

"Because if they did that, Brazil might march one of their Nazi prisoners to a wall and do the same thing. Or the United States would call a halt to these exchange proceedings. No—it had to look like an accident. Trouble is, it does and I haven't a thing to go on."

Two Gestapo men sauntered by and Spencer and Anita stopped talking. They snuffed out the tiny cigarette butts that were left and Spencer moved his chair closer to the woman.

"I've got to get out of here," he whispered.

Anita stiffed a gasp. "They'll shoot

you!" she objected. "They'll be within their rights, too."

"I know. Just the same I have to get out of here and I will. I . . . Who the devil is this guy?"

THE man who approached walked like a ballet dancer. He was elegantly dressed, even though his clothes were not new. He had a thin, black mustache, a swarthy face and black hair.

"He," Anita said, "is Armando. He's a Brazilian. One of the few caught here by the war. A little sticky, perhaps, but not a bad sort. We met yesterday—in the zoo."

Armando stopped, bowed low, and implanted a kiss on Anita's hand. He nodded affably to Jack Spencer and sat down. Spencer talked for a few moments, arose and walked around the lobby of the hotel. Gestapo men kept their eyes on him, but there were many prisoners to watch and Spencer finally found an opportunity to slip through a door leading to the cellar.

He ran lightly down the steps, used his lighter again, and peered around in the gloom. Through a cellar window, he saw the electrified fence no more than a dozen feet away. A sentry paced slowly back and forth. Spencer ducked until the man was out of sight.

Prowling silently, he located a wine cellar, long since looted of its precious contents. He crawled through a small door, lay prone, and snapped on his lighter.

The wine cellar was long, narrow, and no more than three feet high. It was filled with cobwebs and had a musty odor. The floor was dirt. Spencer crawled back to the cellar, risked a quick look out of the window, and noticed that the wine cellar extended well beyond the fence. Elation gripped him. He searched for digging tools and found an old shovel, so badly rusted that the Germans had not taken it for their scrap pile.

It was better than nothing and he set about digging frantically, at the far end of the wine cellar. Lying on his back, he chopped away at the dirt roof, careful not to make any noise. In a short time, the guards would call the roll. He had to finish this and get back within forty-five minutes.

A clod of earth dropped onto his chest. He moved it away, dug again and

then felt cool night air streaming through the hole he had made in the ground above.

He prayed that no Nazi sentry would wander directly above this spot and have it cave in under him. He quickly dusted himself off, climbed the steps, opened the door a crack, and groaned softly. Every prisoner was lined up while an officer called out their names.

Between Jack Spencer and that line-up were at least five Gestapo men, all on the alert. Soon, his name would be called and when there was no answer, all hades would break loose. Spencer wondered if he should make his escape now and take a chance on getting back to Unoccupied France where he had the protection of the United States Government.

Then someone called out. The Gestapo guards moved closer. Anita, standing in the front row, slowly buckled and fell to the floor. In the resulting confusion, Spencer slipped across the room and mingled with the others. He elbowed his way to Anita's side, knelt and raised her head.

"Hunger did this," he accused flatly. "Not an hour ago she was telling me she felt weak and faint."

"Carry her to her room," the officer in charge ordered. "She was given the same food as all the rest. But I will see to it she gets some milk."

Spencer lifted her in his arms, walked toward the steps, and then turned around.

"My name is Jack Spencer," he announced, "when you come to it on the roll call. Don't forget about the milk."

HE CLIMBED the steps. Anita was laughing silently. Spencer got around a corner and chuckled himself.

"For that little act, I owe you my freedom," he said softly. "If I can repay you—"

"It wasn't all pretense," Anita smiled. "When you opened that door and I saw how you were trapped, I actually felt woozy. It was nothing, Mr. Spencer. And I learned a few things from Senor Armando which may interest you."

"For instance?" Spencer put her down and held the door of her room open.

She stopped in the doorway and turned around.

"A fellow named Don Leeds was arrested with the rest of us," she said. "He didn't live in Paris and none of us knew him, but he struck up a warm friendship with Ed Fraser. He was the last man with Fraser, in fact. Perhaps he may know something—if it was murder."


"Take it from me," Spencer said, "it was murder. I'll check on Leeds as soon as I get back—if I get back. What else did Armando say?"

"He asked a million questions about you, that's all. Questions I couldn't have answered if I wanted to. After all, you popped in just like Don Leeds. You may even be a Gestapo agent."

"If I were," Jack Spencer said seriously, "that husband of yours might find himself in a lot of trouble. Seriously though, if I can do anything to help, I will. Soon as the place settles down for the night, I'm taking a walk. Just on a hunch, let me have one of those pictures of your husband and yourself."

CHAPTER III

PASSWORD OF FREEDOM

 **J**ACK SPENCER met Ted Tannen and Armando in the corridor, said good-night to them, and went to his room. Fortunately, he was one of the few who had a single room. Most of the others had to double up.

He sat on the edge of his bed trying to puzzle out just why Ed Fraser had been murdered. It was not an accident, even though the affair had been cleverly pulled off. Fraser must have known something dangerous to the Nazis.

Shortly after midnight, Spencer folded a long letter which he'd written to his superiors in Vichy, stowed it away in a pocket and slipped out of the room. It took him thirty minutes to reach the cellar. Gestapo men patrolled the hotel thickly. He had to duck from one sheltering spot to another and reach his objective by short stages and long waits.

Inside the wine cellar, he seized the shovel, crawled to the end of the tunnel and finished cutting a hole through to freedom. Even outside this fence, he knew, Gestapo guards were constantly on duty. He poked his head out, like a mole, saw the back of a guard, and worked fast. He forced the hole wider,

wriggled through and then quickly recovered it with long strands of grass.

Two minutes after he emerged, he was lying prone behind a thick bush along a path that led all around the hotel, but outside of the electrified fence.

The cumbersome pacing of a guard who was tired, drew closer. Spencer held his breath. If he were found now, they would probably make short work of him and above all else, he wanted to get back to the United States and join the fight in a uniform.

The guard passed on and came to a sudden halt while Spencer's blood froze. He heard a harsh voice.

"Guard, why did you not challenge me? I purposely crept up on you to see if you were prepared for trouble."

"I—I recognized you, sir," the guard answered. "Besides, all the Americans are accounted for and locked behind the steel fence. You could be no one but a friend."

"Fool. Gross idiot. They may have friends on the outside. So you recognized me, eh? That is a lie. I have been in this town for no more than one hour. I have not yet even visited Headquarters of the Gestapo and I probably shall not go there until I am finished with my job concerning the prisoners."

"*Herr Brandt!*" The sentry's voice cracked with fear. "I—I knew you were coming. They told me what you looked like. That you do not wear a uniform. That you head all Gestapo agents in this part of France. That you are undoubtedly the cleverest man in the whole service. No one gets by you. British and French dogs have paid with their lives every time they came against you."

The Gestapo leader drew himself erect. Behind the bush, Jack Spencer watched this and grinned. That soldier may have been a fool in Brandt's opinion, but the American had the idea that the Gestapo leader was the bigger fool. He fell for the common soldier's compliments, forgot all about his failure to challenge him.

"Perhaps I have been too harsh," Brandt said. "So they have heard of me here, eh? I am gratified."

"Excellency"—the sentry breathed it like a prayer—"who in all of Europe has not heard of you and your prowess? I have heard them call you a—a human bloodhound."

Brandt laughed and whacked the soldier on the back.

"Very good. Very, very good. Just be careful to challenge anyone else who may appear. Perhaps I will test your vigilance again, eh?"

"As you wish, Excellency," the soldier answered. "Be assured, all prisoners are well locked up."

BRANDT strolled away in the darkness and the sentry resumed his slow pacing. Behind that bush, Jack Spencer suddenly developed a daring idea. He knew all about Brandt. He was one of the Gestapo hangmen supreme, but always worked in Belgium and Holland. He was a brainy, trusted member of the New Order.

Why had he been sent here, to take over the imprisonment of a hundred odd Americans, mostly all of whom were too old for military service? It didn't make sense. There was something else behind it. Something big enough to attract Brandt's skill.

Spencer's idea came first though and now he had a double mission to perform before he slipped back into the hotel. He crept along the path and waited for that same sentry to return. As the man lumbered up the path, Spencer jumped out again.

Instantly, a rifle came to ready. Spencer threw up his hands and spoke in German.

"Much better, my dear fellow. I came back to test you again."

"*Danke, Herr Brandt,*" the soldier said. "I am glad."

"At first," Spencer said, "I was tempted to have you sent to the Russian front. Now wait—do not start cringing. I believe you are too smart to waste your time here. Go to Gestapo Headquarters at once. How many men are on duty there?"

"Guards, Excellency? Only one, who paces up and down before the door. We have no trouble with the French here."

"Good. Then you will relieve the sentry on duty there and take the post yourself. I shall assign another man here in your place. And you failed in one respect. I told you I was Brandt, but you never asked for proof. You did not require that I show my face even. Remedy that at once."

The sentry nodded eagerly, lit a

match and waved it in front of Jack Spencer's stern features. He blew it out and nodded happily.

"Never again will I forget your face, Excellency. Never."

Spencer walked quietly away. He had tricked this sentry, but if he ever met Brandt, he would be doomed. There were many things to do. Spencer began running as soon as he reached the road back to Moisdon.

He saw the lights of a farmhouse and knew he had to take a chance with the occupants. Creeping up to a window, he peered inside. A middle-aged farmer was sitting in front of the fire. On the floor was a copy of a Nazi-controlled French newspaper. It had been crumpled and hurled to the floor. Spencer smiled. He was safe enough here.

He tapped on the door and it was opened half an inch. Jack Spencer spoke softly and in French.

"Liberty! Equality! Fraternity! Do you understand?"

The door was opened wide, bolted after he entered, and the farmer called out to his wife to bring food—the best. Then he looked more closely at Spencer and frowned.

"You are not French. British perhaps?"

"American—Yankee." Jack Spencer grinned. "But I know the password. It was taught to me by French patriots in Vichy. I was told that almost every farmer works for the Underground."

"We do," the farmer said. "The Boche never touch us because they need our crops. Is it your wish to be sent back to Vichy?"

"No—but I want a letter to go through. If the man who carries it is discovered, he will be shot and so will I. It must be someone you can trust."

"We have many such men. Give me the letter. Within two hours it will be on its way. Now eat. Good food such as even the Boche do not get."

THE American tackled cold chicken with gusto. There was white bread, freshly baked. Cream and butter, even a bit of steak in lieu of dessert. He asked about *Herr* Brandt while he ate.

The farmer shrugged. "We know he is coming and that he is a dangerous man. What puzzles us, *M'sieu*, is why they should send such an important per-

son to this little village. The brains of the Underground are in the big cities and the Gestapo knows this."

"I've been wondering too," the consular agent said. "Furthermore, I'm going to try and find out a few things. Be sure of the letter, my friend. It must not go astray. I am a diplomatic clerk, caught in a trap here. My superiors must know where I am and what I am up to. The letter explains."

He tried to pay for his food, but was roughly refused. Then he went out into the night again and headed straight for the center of Moisdon. He knew where Gestapo Headquarters was located—in the town jail. Handy when the Nazis had people they wished to question and whose screams they did not wish heard too loudly.

What Jack intended doing now had more chance of failure than success, but it had to be done. It was absolutely necessary to learn why a man like Brandt was in charge here, why Ed Fraser had been murdered. Why a lot of things, and the secrets might well lie inside Gestapo Headquarters.

Carefully peering around a corner, Spencer saw the sentry who had been on duty outside the hotel. He had already assumed his post and was pacing up and down in front of the place.

Jack Spencer drew himself erect, pulled his hat down to hide the red hair, and walked briskly up to the entrance. The sentry's rifle came to readiness, then he stiffened to attention.

"I recognize you this time, Excellency," he said.

"See that no one enters," Spencer told him. "I shall be busy with secret proceedings. If I am disturbed, you will be to blame. Is that clear?"

Ja, Excellency. There is no one inside except for one prisoner."

Spencer walked up the four steps to the door, opened it and stepped into a receiving room. He passed through this and found a spacious office decorated with swastikas and the ever-present photograph of Schinkelgruber. Spencer gave him a salute far more in style in Brooklyn than in the Reich.

He sat down behind the desk and the first thing he saw was a blank American passport. Spencer frowned. What was one of these doing here? He examined it briefly. It was the real thing all

right, probably stolen from some conquered nation when the United States staff had fled in a hurry.

There was a seal on the desk too, a rather familiar-looking seal. Spencer thrust a piece of blank paper between the slots, brought down the handle, and got a perfect impression of a United States seal—the kind used on passports.

There was not time to figure this out. He searched the desk drawers and discovered what he wanted. A German passport. From his pocket he took the picture of Anita Clark and her husband. There was glue on the desk. He affixed the picture to the German passport impressed the Reich seal on it, then filled in the blanks. For good measure he also took a Gestapo pass and made this out for Anita and her husband.

CHAPTER IV

WOMEN MUST BE SAVED



FOR a few more minutes Jack Spencer searched files, trying to find the reason for Brandt's presence, but there was nothing. He couldn't afford to spend any more time here. Brandt might return at any moment and even that susceptible guard outside could not put off Brandt for long.

Spencer replaced everything, was tempted to ruin that United States seal, but decided to let it stay and see what developed. He walked across the room and then hesitated. There were two doors and he had forgotten which one led to the outer office. He shrugged, opened the nearest door and stepped into a small room with barred windows.

The only piece of furniture in the room was a low stool and on it sat a girl. A decidedly pretty girl, too, and she had been trying to check tears that came anyway. Her first glance was frightened, apprehensive.

"Good evening," Spencer said in German. "Excuse me. I am looking for someone."

"American," the girl said. "American. Help me! Please help me!"

She spoke with a faint British accent and Jack Spencer whirled around. She was coming toward him, one hand outstretched in silent pleading.

"How did you know I am an Ameri-

can," he asked. "Who the devil are you?"

"Never mind about me, except that I may be shot in the morning. I knew you were an American by the way you wear your clothes, the slant at your hat, your red hair. Don't let me down—please!"

Spencer hesitated. He didn't know what in the world he could do with this girl, but she obviously was sincere and needed help. He took her hand.

"Come on," he said quickly. "I'll get you past the guard outside. Then you're on your own. Is that clear?"

She nodded mutely and her hand felt cold in the young American's grasp. He took her arm when they reached the main door, drew himself up again, and altered the slant of his hat.

The sentry came to attention. Jack Spencer walked past him, still holding tightly to the girl's arm. He turned a corner and started to run. Minutes were as precious as life now.

They trotted along the dirt road leading to the hotel. The girl faltered several times and finally had to stop. Spencer led her off the road and they sat down beneath a tree.

"We can rest for three minutes," he said. "While you're catching your breath, how about some information? Maybe we can both leave this country?"

"My name is Valerie Cabot," she said wearily. "I'm British. I—I was a nurse-maid in Paris before the war began. After Dunkirk I was trapped. I hid, but you can't hide forever. The Gestapo caught up with me at Moisdon. I was being held until some ranking Gestapo man arrived. That's all there is to it, except . . . But how can you, how can anyone get out of this country?"

Spencer pursed his lips for a moment. Then he jumped up, pulled her to her feet and they began running again.

"Might be a way," he said. "In fact, I think there is one. You're coming with me to the hotel on top of the hill. It's full of Americans who are going to be repatriated. I think I can get you a passport. You'll wind up in New York if we're lucky. Is that satisfactory?"

"You ask if going to heaven is satisfactory?" she sighed. "I can't believe it. I'll do anything you ask. Just get me out of here, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Spencer. Jack Spencer. I'm one of the Americans. We'll start crossing this

field now. I . . . Duck! Get down, quickly!"

BOTH dropped flat. Two sentries came along the road carrying searchlights and drawn sidearms. They had been heard. Patrols were further away from the hotel than he had believed.

Spencer held his breath. It was tough to take it alone, but now he had this girl to think about which made matters even worse. Sweat oozed out of every pore. He felt Valerie's hand tight around his fingers. She knew what capture would mean.

The sentries talked in German and from a few words that drifted to the American's ears he knew they were certain that prowlers were about. Finally the pair separated. One of them came straight toward the spot where Spencer and Valerie were hidden.

Jack Spencer put his lips against the girl's ear.

"Crawl ten feet away and stand up. Don't make a sound when he throws the searchlight on you and don't move."

She didn't ask why, just crawled away. Spencer knew the German would hear her. A sharp command rang out. Valerie arose and stood quietly in the ray of the German's flash.

"Ach!" He walked toward her. "A girl. A pretty girl too. What luck!"

He stepped closer, gun ready. Valerie heard the second German soldier heading this way too, in answer to the commotion his mate had caused. The German reached out to seize her. Instead, an arm curled around his throat and he was yanked back. At the same time, Valerie sprang forward, seized his gun hand and brought strong, healthy teeth driving into the flesh of the Nazi's hand. The gun fell and she scooped it up.

There was a sinister crack. The German went limp. Jack Spencer let go and the man flopped to the ground.

Valerie handed the gun to Spencer. It was unfamiliar to him, but in one second he knew how it worked. The other sentry was calling out as he approached.

Spencer pushed Valerie behind a tree, bent down to pick up the flashlight, and a shot rang out. He actually felt the heat of that bullet as it zipped above his head. Without straightening, he fired

back. The German was holding a flashlight of his own and was a perfect target. The flash dropped to the ground. So did the German. Spencer hurried over to him, took a quick look, then sped to where Valerie was waiting.

Hand in hand, they raced across the field, grateful for the tall grass that all but concealed them. He saw the rear of the hotel and that electrified fence. Sentries were running toward the sound of the shots. Twice, Spencer and Valerie Cabot had to duck down and let them pass.

Then he came to the hole leading into the long wine cellar and helped Valerie through it. He seized as much long grass as he could hold, slipped down himself and did a fair job of camouflaging the entrance.

Heavy feet pounded across the floor and more and more Germans rushed out to see what had happened.

"We must be inside the hotel," Valerie panted. "Those two sentries! They'll describe you—and me too."

"Not that pair," Spencer said grimly. "I don't think the population of hades is interested in us and that's where those two are right now. I studied Commando tactics for a while. Come on—we must reach the upstairs rooms before they start checking."

There was no uproar at the hotel, but there was quiet activity. Guards hurried out to locate the source of those shots. As a result, there were only two sentries at the front door and Spencer could evade them easily because the stairway was hidden to their gaze.

WHEN he and Valerie reached Anita's room he knocked softly and the door opened. Anita stared for a moment, then stepped aside so they could enter. Spencer explained quickly.

"Look at this." He laid out the passport he had fixed up at the Gestapo Headquarters. Beside it he placed the military pass. "The pass will get you through any lines because it's official even to the seal. The passport is made out to you and your husband. Reach him—proceed at once to Spain. You won't be refused admittance because this is a Gestapo passport and they have a certain amount of influence at the Border."

Anita could not speak for a moment or two.

"Don't start thanking me," Spencer said, "because if something happens and you don't make it, you're finished. Besides, I want your American passport for Valerie."

Anita excitedly fished it out of her bag. Spencer examined it and nodded.

"Good! The description fits both of you and the picture isn't so hot. There will be a check-up as soon as they find the two guards I killed, so Valerie will have to hide in your room, Anita. Remember she is British, may be classed as a spy, and by helping her you may forfeit your life."

Anita smiled happily. "For that passport, Jack Spencer, I'd risk anything."

"Later on, I'll show you a way out of here and give you instructions on how to reach Paris," he said. "Right now, I'd better get back to my room."

He was none to quick about it. Five minutes after he had undressed and slipped between the bedclothes, there was a knock at his door. He tousled his hair, blinked sleepily, and unlocked it. A Gestapo man, in civilian clothes, brushed the American aside, went over to the bed and thrust a hand between the covers. They were warm and he seemed satisfied. Without a word of explanation, he departed.

For more than an hour, this went on all through the hotel and then things quieted down. At two-forty in the morning Jack Spencer decided to risk a trip to Anita's room. He made it without detection, found Valerie safe, and said to Anita:

"Head north when you leave here. Stay off the road, but close enough to it to follow the route. There is a fork, a mile below the hotel. To the right, you'll see a farmhouse with a red-painted barn behind it. Go there. Tell the farmer you're a friend of the American diplomat from Vichy. He'll see that you reach Paris."

"Diplomat from Vichy?" Anita asked, in a puzzled voice.

"That's me—but I'm only a consular clerk," Spencer said. "I was supposed to tip off people like you that arrests were expected. I failed, but I'm going to see that everyone get back home safely. I'll be back an hour before dawn and show you how to escape."

Valerie came forward. "I don't know how to thank you—"

"Don't even try." He grinned. "You're British and we have to stick together in this mess. Learn all you can from Anita so if you are questioned, you'll have the answers. Good night."

Spencer slipped out of the room, tip-toed back toward his own quarters and heard someone running up the stairs. He ducked for shelter, heard the steps continue down the hall and took a quick look. He was too late to see who it was or what door closed with a loud click.

That person had entered the hotel as "if he were a paying guest, not a prisoner. Jack Spencer frowned. This thing was getting more and more mysterious.

A GAIN, he began the rest of a slow trip to his room. Just before he started to slip the key into the lock, he heard a strident yell from outside the hotel. An instant later the main door banged open and a man fled into the lobby. He was short, a little overweight, and looked as though he had crawled through thickets and swamps.

The most obvious thing about him was his terror and a determination to get something done. He was halfway across the lobby before the astounded guards pounced on him. The man started to screech something, but a hand was clapped across his mouth.

Four uniformed Gestapo men with drawn guns hurried into the lobby. Following them came a man of medium height, thin-faced and slender. He was dressed in civilian clothes, but exuded an air of authority. He stepped up to the prisoner, slapped him with the back of his hand, then whipped a gun from his hip pocket.

Slowly he reversed the weapon to be used as a club. He spoke, but in a voice so low that Spencer could hear nothing. He raised the gun and while the terrorized prisoner was firmly held, brought the gun down with murderous intent.

Jack Spencer did not forget his own position for one moment, but he couldn't stand by and watch a man's brains beaten out. He ran noisily down the steps. The man with the gun bellowed orders. This time his voice was loud enough to be recognized and Spencer knew who he was.

Brandt! The ace Gestapo agent! One of the deadliest men in that whole black service!

CHAPTER V

FRENCHMAN WITH GOOD SHOES



WITH a swift move Jack Spencer evaded one guard who tried to seize him, veered aside as another made a pass with a gun, but stopped long enough to smash home a haymaker to the jaw. The prisoner was slumped in the arms of the pair who held him, but he was still conscious.

Spencer ran straight toward Brandt and so quickly that the Gestapo man did not have time to turn his gun around and shoot. The American's fist thudded against the Nazi's stomach and Brandt gave a howl of pain as he doubled up. Spencer rapped him hard on the jaw, pushed him arm's length away and shot a right jab to the nose.

He saw blood spurt, saw the look of astonishment and pain on Brandt's face, and then everything turned red. Red, just like blood. Spencer felt himself slipping. The floor came up and he fell on it. There was another thump right beside him. That would be the mystery man they had chased into the hotel.

Vaguely, Jack Spencer heard mumbled words. They came from this man and never did make much sense, but he was trying desperately to say what was in his mind.

"Spy—America—danger—get him. Fraser mur—mur—murdered."

A shot punctuated the end of that sentence. Jack Spencer mentally braced himself for the next bullet. Mentally, because his muscles and nerves were completely paralyzed and limp. . . .

It seemed that hours passed. He was being tossed around like a dummy and every time his eyes opened, he could still see that veil of blood and nothing else. His ears told him that confusion reigned. There were loud, protesting voices, sharp orders, and once in a while the sound of a blow.

Someone wiped blood out of the consular clerk's eyes. So that's what made him see nothing but red. As his vision cleared, he saw Valerie trying to help him, paying no attention to a Nazi who was doing his best to pull her away without actually lifting her up.

A sharp slap steadied Spencer's wits. His brain worked clearly now. Brandt

stood before him, scowling.

"Why did you interfere?" he demanded. "The punishment for interfering with the Gestapo is death. You know that, American swine."

"I know I couldn't stand by and watch you beat a helpless man to death," Spencer retorted. "A man who was being held by your stooges while you hammered his brains out. If that makes me an American swine, I'm glad of it, but I hate to think what it makes you."

Brandt raised a clubbed fist, hesitated, then lowered his arm.

"That man is now dead. He was killed trying to escape. We arrested him, but he broke loose and ran in here, probably hoping some foolish American could help. I was forced to shoot him. He was a French spy."

"But he was still a human being!" Jack Spencer argued hotly. "Or maybe you wouldn't recognize a human after associating with faceless men so long."

Brandt smiled to cover up his anger. "Quite cocky, aren't you? May I remind you that you are an enemy of the Reich? That you are of military age and can be interned? That all of you here may be locked up for the duration?"

An American whom Spencer had not noticed before, went to his side. He was a husky individual with a slightly twisted nose that looked as if it were the result of a football game. Despite this, he was not ugly.

"He's right, Jack," this man said, calling Spencer by name. "Nobody blames you for trying to help that poor chap they just carried out. But consider all of us as a group. Relax, man. This is war. We got to take a lot of things."

"Who are you?" Spencer demanded.

"My name is Don Leeds. I'm going to be repatriated too. And believe me, it's like a dream for all of us. Don't turn it into a nightmare, Jack."

"All right," Spencer said. "I made a fool of myself, I guess."

TWO Gestapo men led Jack Spencer to the hotel manager's office and shoved him into a chair. They mounted guard until Brandt bustled in. Brandt eyed the young American with open malevolence.

"You are an impulsive person, eh?" he growled. "So impulsive that you might have escaped from this hotel earl-

ier tonight and murdered two of my men."

"I'd even risk a crazy thing like that if I knew I'd meet you somewhere outside," Spencer grunted. "Otherwise, I don't know what you're talking about."

Brandt sat down. "You will. Also, I promise that if you know anything about those murders tonight, I shall find out. You'll tell me because not until you do will the pain stop. You will be willing to talk. Wait and see."

Spencer digested that threat for a second and knew that desperate circumstances called for equally desperate measures.

"So I'm under arrest," he said slowly. "I won't be permitted to take that train to Lisbon, I suppose."

"That is correct. You are of military age."

"I suppose you know," Spencer went on, "that the nephew of one of your big shots in the Foreign Office is interned in Brazil. This whole transaction is mainly to get him back to Germany. Well, if I'm held here, he'll be held in Brazil. What do you think of that?"

"Nonsense," Brandt sneered. Then he looked at Spencer sharply. "Just how did you know this?"

"Because I'm connected with the United States legation in Vichy. They know I am here, under arrest. They will notify Brazil that if I am not returned with these others, then that pet nephew will also remain where he is. Go ahead and phone Vichy if you don't believe me."

Brandt tapped the end of his fingers a bit nervously. He arose.

"Very well. You shall go along with the others. But if you are not telling the truth, I shall personally remove you from the train before it passes into neutral territory. You cannot escape, because the train will be sealed and guarded. Now go back and prepare. You leave here within an hour."

When Jack Spencer emerged from the office, he saw Valerie at the foot of the steps. Her worried face relaxed somewhat. She took his arm and they both went to the second floor.

"Jack," she said, "that man who was shot. I saw them place him on a stretcher. He was no Frenchman. His clothes were old and rugged, but his shoes—they had rubber heels and im-

pressed on the heel was a trademark well known in the United States and England. No Frenchman has owned a pair of shoes like that for years."

"I know," Spencer answered softly. "He was trying to talk just before they killed him. He told me Fraser had been murdered, just as I thought. Did Anita tell you about Fraser? Good. This stranger also muttered something concerning a spy. We'll talk about it later on. Right now, I've got to get Anita out of here."

"She has already gone, Jack. I told her how to get away. In the confusion she found a perfect chance."

Spencer closed both eyes and breathed a long sigh of relief.

"Then you pack Anita's things. We're being taken to a train. I'm not in the clear yet, but I'd like to see those Nazis put me off once I'm aboard."

The military trucks, jammed with prisoners, pulled up to the small railroad station platform. Oddly enough, the platform was crowded and most of the prospective passengers were farmers. They milled around excitedly.

GESTAPO guards cleared a path as the train began slowing up for the stop. But there were only thirty guards and more than two hundred prospective passengers. The guards were overwhelmed.

Spencer seized Valerie's arm and held her tightly. They were shoved around by the swarming crowd although everyone was good-natured about it and there were profuse apologies.

Brandt was there, roaring for order, but nobody paid any attention to him. He yelled commands. The Gestapo men drew guns and blackjacks.

Someone bumped violently against Jack Spencer. It was the farmer he had seen the night before, the man to whom he had sent Anita. Something white flashed and a hand dug into Spencer's coat pocket. Then the farmer was carried away by the crowd which retreated under the threats of the guards.

Suddenly the platform was clear except for the prisoners who were quickly herded into a group. The Gestapo agents stared in stunned surprise. Spencer barely noticed all this. He stepped behind Valerie, fished out the note which that farmer had placed in his pocket

and was surprised to find it had been written by Anita. He ripped the paper into shreds and held them in one hand as he shuffled along toward the compartment assigned to him.

On his way he bent quickly, raised the iron lid of an axle bearing box and stuffed the papers inside. By the time they were found, they would either be ground to a pulp or so soaked with grease that they would hardly be noticed let alone read. He was the last person in line and none noticed this act.

Valerie wore a coat which belonged to Anita and kept the collar of it pulled high around her head. Anita had attracted some attention by fainting the night before, but Spencer doubted any of these Gestapo men would miss her or notice the presence of a new face. Nevertheless, it did no harm to be careful.

Papers were being examined as each prisoner was assigned a compartment. Directly ahead of Valerie was Ted Tannen and Don Leeds. They seemed friendly. Slightly to one side of them shuffled Armando, the Brazilian, and he was strangely quiet, depressed.

"Jack," Valerie whispered, "what on earth happened at the platform? All those people crowding and shoving, and then they disappeared as if by magic." After the dangers they had passed through together, ordinary things were waved. It was "Jack" and "Valerie" now.

"You just witnessed a minor demonstration of the French Underground," Spencer answered in a low voice. "It was carried out for one purpose—to plant a letter in my pocket."

"A letter?" Valerie asked quickly.

"From Anita. She wrote it at the farmhouse. Seems the French Underground knew something about the man who was killed in the hotel lobby last night. The Gestapo chased him clear from Paris because he knew what was going on and wanted to warn us."

"It must have been terribly important," Valerie opined. "They certainly killed him quickly enough."

"It was. Seems we have a Nazi spy in our midst. The cleverest one ever turned out by their espionage schools. He has been fitted out with passports and papers stolen from an American. In

this identity he hopes to pass the usual F.B.I. scrutiny when we reach New York. Then he'll be free to carry on the work assigned to him."

Valerie gave Spencer a worried look. "If they thought you knew this, Jack, they'd—"

"Get rid of me just as they got rid of the man who did his best to warn us. I know, Val, but it doesn't make much difference. This is war and anything goes. I'll fight back with everything I have. That spy probably intends to rebuild the Nazi spy system in the United States. It has been pretty well smashed, you know. That's what makes him so dangerous. If he gets away with it, he'll accomplish his purpose."

CHAPTER VI

PITFALL



VALERIE didn't comment because she and Jack Spencer were now at the head of the line. Tannen and Leeds climbed into a compartment. A Gestapo guard gave Spencer a push and indicated that he and Valerie were to share the compartment with Tannen and Leeds.

They climbed in and settled down across from the other two Americans. Tannen closed the door. Leeds shut the one leading into the aisle. Then Tannen leaned closer.

"I miss Anita, Jack," he said, "and I notice a new face among us. If it is something I should not know—"

"Anita didn't come with us," Spencer said. "She had other plans. Meet Valerie Cabot. She's British, was trapped in France and as a friendly gesture, Anita gave her the passport which Anita did not hope to use again. I'm depending on you two to keep this quiet."

"Absolutely," Leeds said, with a broad grin. "We're more than delighted to help, especially anyone as lovely as you, Miss Cabot. It's quite apparent you did not spend a long time in France or you would have lost that bloom in your cheeks."

"I lived in Paris before the war," Valerie said. "I—fled to the country and paid a farmer to hide me. There was plenty to eat."

Jack Spencer saw Brandt stalking down the platform, followed by several of his agents. They stopped at every compartment and slapped long pieces of paper across the door. One man wielded a paste brush.

"We're being sealed in," Spencer said. "They do that with diplomatic trains. Nobody can get off the train, nor on it. We're a long way from neutral territory so the ride should be quite interesting—and exciting perhaps."

"I've had enough excitement," Tannen said. "I can't wait to see that old lady with the torch in New York Harbor. Then I've another disagreeable job to do. Inform Ed Fraser's people about what happened. Spencer, they ought to get something out of those Nazi killers because of what happened to Fraser. It was their fault."

"We'll write Hitler personally." Jack Spencer laughed. "Just the same, I never was satisfied about Fraser's death. There was a door near that lion's cage. Someone could have slipped in, murdered him and got away before we knew what was going on."

"I'm not satisfied about it either," Tannen agreed. Fraser knew about the lion, and he never took risks."

"Nonsense," Leeds commented dryly. "We all saw the blood on that lion's paw. The wound was caused by the lion's claws. Fraser just got lost in the dark, stumbled up against the cage and—"

The train gave a jerk and the railroad platform began to slip away. Throughout the train a cheer arose. A long, lingering cheer from the throats of people who had not believed this would ever happen. The first leg of a journey back home! Home where there was butter and coffee, warm clothing, newspapers that told the truth, and people who smiled and laughed. Even Valerie joined in the cheering.

French countryside whizzed past. Now and then they saw ruined houses and barns, token of the invader's wrath. Farmers in the fields never even looked up as the train passed. This was not the France of five years ago. This was a sullen, brooding France, barely held in check by the ruthlessness of the Nazis and their frequent firing squads. A France that was getting ready to leap over the traces at the first opportunity.

The inner door of their compartment

was slid back and a uniformed guard spoke Jack Spencer's name. Spencer arose, wondering what this was all about.

"Come with me," the guard said.

SPENCER grinned at Valerie, waved a careless salute to Tannen and Leeds and stepped into the aisle. He was roughly shoved along by the guard. Every few steps the Gestapo man would bend down and peer out of windows as if to see where they were.

At the end of the car he elbowed in front of the American and seemed to have trouble opening the door. They passed through four more cars, going forward all the time. Obviously, that guard was stalling and Spencer tried to figure out why. He decided to stall too, and see what happened.

The guard appeared to be quite satisfied with this until they passed out of the last car and paused in front of a door marked "Baggage." Spencer steadied himself on the swaying platform. The train whistle hooted one short blast. That seemed to be a signal. The guard seized Spencer's arm and literally threw him against the baggage car door.

It opened and at that instant the train dived into a tunnel. Utter blackness descended. The train lights had been turned out. Spencer felt a big hand flat against the small of his back. That hand started to shove. He didn't wait for the act to be completed, but gave a flying leap into the baggage car.

Something crashed just behind him. He felt the breeze of the heavy object, felt the car floor jolt under its impact. Then he blundered against someone and the anger that surged through him took material form. He jabbed his fists forward—short, vicious punches that hurt.

He felt a fist whiz past his ear, turned and drove a straight right blindly into the darkness. It met flesh and drew a howl. To one side there was violent scuffling, curses, and the sound of blows being struck. Spencer grinned. Here was where he had a distinct advantage. Any man in this car was his enemy, but they were handicapped by the darkness and were fighting among themselves.

The American slowly moved back a few feet, crouched, and started swinging his arms in wide arcs until he encountered a pair of substantial hips. Both

arms closed around this man and dragged him to the floor. Jack Spencer whaled the hardest punch he could summon and guided it more by instinct than anything else. It connected with a jaw and the form he straddled went suddenly limp.

Locating the Luger holstered at the man's hip, Spencer drew it free and scurried toward the further corner of the car. He recalled that these baggage cars all had narrow racks near the roof. By sense of feel, he located this and also encountered what felt like old rags or parts of a uniform. He slid the gun beneath these and left it there. An ace in the hole that might prove to be handy.

The car was fairly quiet now. He knew the men were moving forward slowly, trying to make sure they were not getting into any more fights among themselves. Spencer moved too, until he felt the door handle. This exit would take him still further toward the front of the train, but anything was better than facing the four or five Gestapo men who were actually panting in rage.

Spencer gave the handle a forward push. The door swung toward him. He opened it, slipped through, and let it close gently behind him.

The cool air seeping through the platform doors felt good. He had no doubts about the trouble he was in. Orders must have been given that he was to be killed. Purely by accident, of course. But now that he realized there was a dangerous spy aboard, traveling on the papers of an American, he had to come through.

A SPY like that could wreak havoc in the United States. Then there was Valerie. He had known her only a few hours, but that didn't seem to matter. He liked her—liked the calm with which she stood this ordeal. The way her blue eyes could crackle in fury; her smile and the soft roundness of her body. She was also worth living for.

Someone fumbled with the platform door of the baggage car. Jack Spencer quietly opened the other door and moved into the front car. He was surprised to find it Class A accommodations. The passageway was narrow and he moved sideward until he reached the main part of the car. A door blocked his way, but he had to go on.

Opening it, he blinked at the brilliant light that assailed his eyes. Then he made out the form of Brandt, slowly rising from a chair behind a small desk at the far end of the car. Brandt, now in full Gestapo uniform and scowling fiercely.

"Good afternoon, *Herr Brandt*," Spencer bowed slightly. "Should I have asked for an appointment?"

"What do you want?" Brandt demanded. "How did you get here?"

"Do you mean, how did I escape the pitfalls in my way, *Herr Brandt*? Perhaps I'm a soft, decadent American with a lot of luck. On the other hand, I may be tougher than I seem."

"I don't know what you are talking about," Brandt snapped. "Why did you come here?"

"To find out if I am permitted to remain with this party and be sent home." Jack Spencer shrugged. "After all, I have had some doubts. Did you contact the American Charge d'Affaires in Vichy? Did you discover that your ranking officer in the Foreign Ministry does have a nephew under arrest in Brazil?"

"You are permitted to go through," Brandt said surlily. "I myself am accompanying the party to see that everything is proper. Now get out of here."

Spencer did not move. One of the guards had silently slipped up behind him and a gun was drilling the small of his back. He raised his hands high.

"It seems you want me to leave, but someone else has other ideas," he said to Brandt slowly. "Has the gentleman with the gun a black eye? Or a bruised and swollen jaw? Your men were having quite a battle among themselves back in the baggage car."

CHAPTER VII

CHECKMATE

BRANDT barked an order in German. The gun was removed from Jack Spencer's back and the guard stepped forward. His uniform was torn and there was a little dried blood around the corners of his mouth. He gave Brandt a rapid report.

Brandt's face grew sterner, his eyes narrowed and he made fists out of his hands.



"Spencer," he said curtly, "my guard tells me you deliberately started fighting. That is not permitted. If you keep this up, I shall revoke the visé on your passport."

Spencer laughed a little. "You wouldn't dare, Brandt. I'm the only man in this party for whom the Brazilian Government will release that nephew of the Reich."

Brandt dropped a hand to the gun holstered at his hip. He whipped it out, leveled the weapon, and Jack Spencer wondered, with a shudder, if he had carried this game too far.

Then there was a commotion behind him. An angry voice spoke in English and Ted Tannen surged into the car with two Gestapo men hanging onto his arms.

"What is this?" Tannen yelled.

Brandt instantly lowered the gun. "I was merely trying to emphasize, for the benefit of Mr. Spencer, that we shall tolerate no fighting on this train. He was about to attack me so I drew my gun in self-defense."

Tannen glanced at the Gestapo man who stood with a pistol in his hand, trying to comprehend the sudden turn of events.

"It looks like it!" Tannen thundered. "I don't know who you are, sir. I don't give a hoot in hades, but I hope you understand English enough to know that if anything happens to Jack Spencer, you'll be held accountable! Now, if you don't want us for anything else, we'll be going."

"Just a moment," Brandt barked. "Spencer, that woman Anita Clark—she seems to be in your company a great deal. Perhaps you are in love with her, eh?"

"It does happen," Spencer admitted, "but I fail to see how that concerns you. Come on, Tannen, there's smell in this car I don't like."

No one attempted to stop them. On the platform in front of the baggage car door, Jack Spencer paused to wipe sweat off his face.

"Thanks, pal," he said. "I'm still doubtful whether or not Brandt was going to shoot. He didn't dare when you showed up."

Tannen scowled. "I followed you when that Gestapo monkey herded you to the front of the train. I saw him

shove you into the baggage car, but when I reached it, the door was locked. They opened it later on and I barged right through."

Spencer led the way across the baggage car and winced at the sight of a long, narrow box lying on the floor. That was what had crashed down right behind him. He could have been crushed by the thing. He gave it an experimental shove with his foot. It didn't budge.

"I was supposed to be underneath that box," Spencer told Tannen. "Brandt doesn't like my company."

"We'd better stick close," Tannen said. "Brandt gave me the fish eye too. Maybe I'm on his list for extermination. Have you any idea why they'd prefer you dead?"

"Faintly," Spencer replied. "I think they suspect I may know that your partner's death in the lion house was not an accident."

Tannen gasped and stopped short. "Jack," he demanded, "have you anything to prove he was murdered? I've got to know. It's imperative. My own life may be in danger."

"I have no proof beyond a pretty good-sized hunch. What are you worried about?"

"Fraser and I used to get about Paris quite a lot. He had a knack for sticking his nose in the wrong places. A week ago both of us blundered into a hotel where Occupation Army officers are housed. We heard a group discussing certain weaknesses in the Nazi fortifications in Belgium. When I was arrested, I thought they were taking me in for that and I had visions of a bullet-scarred wall."

Spencer whistled. "Perhaps there is the motive. Tannen, whatever you know must be told to the others. Such information must go through. Come on back to our compartment."

THEY hurried through the cars. Spencer saw that the Brazilian, Armando, was not in his compartment. Then he had a second shock. Don Leeds was alone in their own quarters. Valerie had disappeared.

"She was here when I left," Tannen answered Spencer's unspoken question. "Wake up, Leeds, and find out where she went."

Leeds awoke with a start, blinked

owlishly, and then jumped to his feet. "What's wrong? Aren't we going to be allowed to finish the trip?"

"No reason why not," Spencer answered. "Where is Valerie?"

"Good gosh, I don't know." Leeds looked around. "Maybe she went out to wash up or something."

"She wouldn't dare leave this compartment for fear of being recognized," Tannen said tartly. "You know that, Don."

"We'll, I'm not her guardian," Leeds snapped. "If she wants to prowl, that's her business. You two act as though I might have tossed her out the door."

Spencer turned and headed for the rear of the train. He inspected every compartment in each car, but there was no trace of Val. He recalled Brandt's odd statement about his being in love with her. There was more than just idle curiosity to that remark.

And where was Armando, the Brazilian? Spencer started to retrace his steps and this time he looked in the wash rooms. Suddenly the train plunged into another tunnel. An instant later, Spencer heard a shrill scream of sheerest terror. He began running, heedless of the questions passengers flung at him. That scream sounded as though it came from directly outside the car through which he had been moving.

Reaching the platform, he felt cooler air than usual and realized that one of the doors must have been open for a moment. There was the smell of fumes from the engine, too. Oddly enough, that platform was dark.

Spencer reached up and found an overhead bulb loose in its socket. He tightened it and the platform was flooded with yellow light.

Both doors were equipped with inside seals. Spencer examined one, found it intact, and looked at the other. It was official, all right, but—the glue hadn't even hardened. This door had been opened, someone flung out to bounce against the tunnel wall, fly back and be ground to death under the wheels of the train.

The cry could have come from either a man or a woman. Jack Spencer felt all the horror of it still seeping through his brain. Lips tight, eyes sparkling dangerously, he proceeded through the whole train until he reached the bag-

gage car. That long box had been propped up again and rocked gently with the rhythm of the train's movement.

That box! Easily large enough to accommodate a human being. Only one person had been thrown off the train. Two were missing, because Jack had seen no sign of Armando during his search, either. There was a fifty-fifty chance that he, and not Valerie, had been the victim.

At no time had any of the Gestapo guards tried to interfere with Jack Spencer. Right now, one of them stood with his back against the further baggage car door and he seemed to be smiling contemptuously.

Spencer gave the long box a hard shove. As it toppled over, he tried to stop it from crashing, but the heavy thing slid right through his grasp. It was equipped with a hinged lid which was screwed down. Spencer looked around, saw a kit of tools and seized a screw driver. Working furiously, while the guard stood by, he got the lid open, raised it—and groaned.

The case was jammed full of pamphlets. Nazi propaganda stuff. Spencer dropped the lid, walked slowly toward the car door and hoped that the guard would try to stop him. The Gestapo man did not; merely moved aside and even opened the door for him. He gave an exaggerated bow.

SPENCER recognized these symptoms of Nazi confidence. They were laughing at him, knowing they held all the cards in the deck. He stepped into Brandt's private car. The Gestapo official looked up, his eyes challenging the American to start something.

Jack Spencer sat down. He had to know whether or not Valerie was dead. The only way was by admitting defeat, and the consular clerk felt no delusions about the fact that he was licked.

"What is your proposition, Brandt?" he asked bluntly.

"Proposition?" Brandt wrinkled his face. "Why should I make any proposition to you?"

"Lay off, will you? I know when I'm finished. Where is the girl?"

Brandt leaned across the small desk.

"I'm afraid you speak in riddles. Someone is—missing, perhaps?"

"Look," Spencer said. "Let's drop pretenses. For some reason you don't want me to reach Lisbon and the United States. For that same reason I am going to my own country. You can't stop me—not even by murder—because if you do, the whole necessity for this transfer of prisoners falls flat."

"Now that I think of it," Brandt said, "we are one short. I counted the prisoners as they went aboard. Just a moment." Brandt glanced through several papers and then looked up again. "It is the woman Anita Clark. She did not board the train. Foolish of her to escape. There will not be another chance to go home."

"All right," Spencer admitted, "she did escape. By now, she is in Spain. But there is someone else missing—another girl who was in my compartment when your gorilla brought me to the baggage car as the guest star in an accident intended to be fatal. When I got back, she was gone."

"Too bad," Brandt said mockingly. "An American, of course?"

Jack sighed and closed both eyes wearily. "You know who she is, Brandt. You know blamed well where she is, too. I said I'd listen to a proposition, didn't I?"

Brandt arose. "Then you admit I have been too clever for you. Much too clever. You furnished Anita Clark with a passport. A blank one was missing from my desk at Moisdon. You were quite neat about that, Mr. Spencer. Of course, I learned what you had done. The stupid guard remembered your red hair, and you are the only prisoner with red hair."

"Where is she?" Jack repeated hollowly.

Brandt disregarded his question. "The guard remembered just before I shot him. People regain their memories when they face rifles. Very amazing. So now you come crawling to me, begging mercy for a British spy. A spy who was under arrest when you freed her. You want a proposition. Well, here it is. I shall give you a gun. You will do as I direct."

"Better not get too free with a weapon, Brandt," Spencer said. "I might succumb to temptation."

"And have the girl tortured and then shot? No, I have studied Americans.

Where women are concerned, they are softer than usual. With this gun you will shoot Don Leeds. Then you will kill Ted Tannen and, finally send a bullet through your own head. I shall indicate that you went mad."

CHAPTER VIII

TIME TO DIE



MOTIONLESS, Jack Spencer looked at the proffered gun. This was a typical Nazi gesture—to get a man down and then trample on him. To take a hostage, and compel an enemy to obey the direct command. Any underhanded method of fighting was fair to these men without hearts or souls.

"Mr. Leeds first and then Tannen," Brandt repeated, with a smirk. "I shall provide you with privacy when you wish to—execute the third person I insist upon having removed."

"How do I know you'll keep your promise about the girl? How do I know she's even alive?"

Brandt shrugged. "A chance you will have to take. Here—this is the Clark woman's passport which the English girl used. It was in her handbag. Is that proof enough we have her?"

"I don't need proof of that," Spencer said. "The fact that she is missing indicates she has either been captured or murdered. Just why do you want Tannen and Leeds killed?"

Brandt fished a fingernail file out of his pocket and began working on his nails. He seemed extremely occupied by this. The gun lay on the edge of the desk within easy reach of where Jack Spencer was seated.

"It really makes no difference whom you kill," Brandt said and the American knew he lied. "Tannen and Leeds seem to be your closest friends, the people to whom you may have confided certain things. Also, it is enough that you obey orders without questioning them. You are in no position to bargain."

Spencer picked up the gun. He had an idea that the moment his hand started moving toward the weapon, hidden guns were brought to bear on him. If he lifted the Luger quickly, aimed it at Brandt, he would probably be dead a fraction of a second later.

Calmly he removed the clip. There were three bullets in the gun.

"You certainly don't expect me to miss, do you?" he asked dryly.

Brandt looked up with a faint smile.

"Our firing squads have executed thousands of our enemies," he said. "You may not know it, but the firing squad of four men does its damage with only one bullet. Three of the rifles contain a blank. We cannot afford to be careless with bullets, you see. So if they can do it, you certainly will not fail."

Jack Spencer stuffed the gun into his pocket, arose and walked slowly toward the door. Brandt called him and he turned around.

Brandt waved the fingernail file as a teacher waves a pencil at some recalcitrant student.

"Mind you, Mr. Spencer, there is a time limit. Two hours and no more. Promptly at the end of one hundred and twenty minutes, the girl—well, use your imagination. Good hunting, Mr. Spencer."

The young American grimaced and headed back toward his own car. There were two men guarding the baggage car, but he paid no attention to them. It was dark outside now and they were not too far from a neutral border. Much more than two hours' journey though, and that was all the time allotted to Spencer for his murder task.

Somewhere on board this train was a spy. Leeds? Tannen? Armando, who was missing? Even Valerie herself? Or was it some insignificant person quietly merged with the main group of passengers?

Jack Spencer had little to go on. The murder of Ed Fraser in the lion house had something to do with it. So did the disappearance of Armando. Spencer firmly believed it had been the Brazilian who had been hurled off the train as it passed through the tunnel. Brandt would hardly have dared kill Valerie. She was much too useful a hostage.

SPENCER began walking faster as he neared his own car. He decided to be direct—to question Tannen and Leeds, put the whole thing squarely up to them. But Leeds was the only one in the compartment and he was busy staring out of the window into inky blackness, trying to figure out where they were.

"Oh, hello." He smiled at Spencer. "Tannen told me you had a bit of trouble with that Gestapo officer."

"Leeds," Spencer said, "until you approached me in the lobby of the hotel at Moisdon, I never saw you before. I've talked to you infrequently since then. Just who are you, anyway?"

"Why, I thought everyone knew that."

Leeds looked out of the window again. "I was the business and advertising manager for an American newspaper in Paris. The *Sphere* . . . We're going along at a pretty good clip. We're at least two hundred miles beyond Dentz already."

"How do you know?" Spencer queried.

Leeds gave him a peculiar glance. "I noticed the station as we passed through. The city also. We slowed up for it."

"We passed through Dentz just about the time that Valerie disappeared," Spencer accused. "You told me you'd been asleep all the time. Now you say you were awake. Leeds—you're a liar. I want to see your passport."

Leeds laughed. He seemed entirely at his ease. So much so that Jack Spencer's suspicions were rising fast. After all, a Nazi spy would feel perfectly safe while he was in German-conquered territory and protected by Gestapo guards. Leeds handed over his passport and Spencer examined it briefly. He gave it back without comment.

"Suppose we drop the matter," Leeds said. "I hate arguments. Why don't you pick on Tannen for a change?"

Spencer looked around. Tannen was leaning against the compartment door. He had apparently been there for some time without making his presence known. Spencer asked for his passport, too, and Tannen produced it. Receiving it back, Tannen gave a barely perceptible jerk of his head and went away.

"Why," Spencer asked, "does Herr Brandt want you killed, Mr. Leeds?"

Leeds gasped at that one and sat erect.

"Wants me killed? Good heavens, I don't know! Does he?"

"You have less than two hours to live," Spencer told him. "That warning should be worth something to you. Pay me back by truthfully answering one question. Were you, or were you not, asleep when Valerie left this compartment?"

Leeds was growing more and more nervous. He kept biting his lower lip and hardly seemed to hear the consular clerk's question. He recovered his wits with a start.

"I—was asleep," he declared. "Really, I was. Dozing perhaps and I did notice us pass through Dentz, but I don't know when Valerie departed, nor where she went."

Tannen was outside the compartment again, impatient to see Jack Spencer alone. Spencer walked out and Tannen led him to an empty compartment. He closed the door, sat down, and leaned forward eagerly.

"I overheard Leeds telling about his occupation in Paris. That's a lie. I knew the business manager of the *Sphere's* Paris Edition. His name was Leeds, too, but I never did find out his first name. Jack—the Don Leeds we know is a fake."

"So I'm beginning to comprehend," Spencer said slowly. "You are sure about this, Tannen?"

"I'm positive. The Leeds who worked for that newspaper died in Paris eight weeks ago. Of natural causes. Jack, I think Leeds turned Valerie over to the Gestapo. Probably tricked her into a trap of some kind. The same with Armando. He's gone also."

"Stay here," Spencer said. "I'll be right back."

H HE HURRIED to the compartment which Armando had shared with two other men. He asked pertinent questions and got quick, honest replies.

"No, Armando hasn't returned yet," one man said. "He was talking to us when a girl went by—the one who was with you all the time in the hotel. Armando immediately arose, followed her, and that's the last we've seen of him. Is anything wrong, Mr. Spencer?"

"You are the only representative of the United States Government aboard this train," the other man broke in. "We must rely on you. There won't be any trouble getting to Lisbon, will there?"

"You'll get there," Spencer promised grimly, "if I have to kill a couple of men to make certain of it. Which of these suitcases belongs to Armando?"

He took the one they pointed out, carried it back to the compartment where Tannen waited and opened the locked

suitcase by the simple method of cutting through its leather side. Clothing and papers spilled out. Spencer picked up several pieces of paper. They were advertising cuts.

"Look," he said, and showed them to Tannen. "Armando was a business representative and must have taken a lot of ads in the *Sphere*. A long time ago, I'll grant, because no newspaper except Nazi-inspired ones have been permitted to exist since the occupation. But these cuts prove that Armando had dealings with the real Don Leeds."

"That's it," Tannen grunted. "Armando knew this Don Leeds was a fake. He had reasons for not exposing him perhaps, but the false Leeds made certain that Armando would do no talking. In my opinion, the Brazilian has been murdered. Leeds is a Nazi. He must be so important that Brandt was willing to risk trouble by having one passenger missing. Jack, there is something going on. Something big, and Leeds is right in the middle of the web."

There was half a pack of American cigarettes in Armando's bag. Dry and carefully hoarded. Spencer gave half to Tannen, lighted one for himself and stuffed the rest into his pocket. He smoked slowly, enjoying every puff to its fullest. American cigarettes were as rare in Paris as were merciful Nazis.

The smoke helped him relax, steady his nerves. Then they were torn raw again. Brandt opened the compartment door and stuck his head in. He was smiling in high satisfaction.

"It is getting late, Mr. Spencer. In less than two hours we shall be at the Border and our little bargain must be completed before then. Can I depend on you?"

Spencer grasped the door handle and slid it shut so fast that Brandt had to leap back. His smile died away and he scowled. Then he disappeared.

"What did he mean?" Tannen asked. "Time is getting short? What is that bargain you two have?"

"I'm afraid you'll find out, Tannen," Spencer said. "Don't ask for unpleasant news. I've made up my mind, though. Leeds is going to tell me the truth. All of it—if I have to shoot him."

He drew the Luger and calmly pumped a bullet into the firing chamber. He dropped the gun into a side pocket,

but before he could arise, Don Leeds hurried past the compartment without looking in. Spencer yanked the door open, and Tannen grabbed his arm.

"Jack, what the devil—"


Jack Spencer pulled himself free. "I said I was going to make Leeds talk. Valerie's life depends upon it. Don't try to stop me, Tannen, or you might—"

He didn't finish the threat, just hurried in the same direction which Leeds had taken. Tannen sat down slowly, remained seated for about a minute or two, then hurried in pursuit of Spencer. He was halfway through the car when a single shot rang out.

Tannen began running, paying no attention to the anxious queries of the passengers. He reached the platform between cars and stopped quickly. One of the platform doors was ajar. Neither Spencer nor Leeds were anywhere about. The seal on that door had been ruthlessly ripped off.

CHAPTER IX

THE STAMP OF GUILT



TANNEN ran forward again, passed through the baggage car and still saw nothing of Jack Spencer or Leeds. But suddenly, as he found himself in the passageway to Brandt's private quarters he could hear Spencer's voice.

Tannen quickly stepped into the compartment.

"Brandt," Jack Spencer said coolly, "I've killed Leeds. I shot him through the head and pushed him out of a platform door. You'd better have that door resealed."

"Very good," Brandt said. "I shall have the train searched to see if you are telling the truth. What of *Herr Tannen*?"

"He's next," Spencer said grimly. "I'm beginning to find out how it feels to be a Nazi now. If I kept this up, I might discover I like to murder people, just as you and your kind do. Don't worry—Tannen will be taken care of, although I'm still wondering why you want those men executed."

Brandt leaned back and his chair squeaked dismally.

"I have told you—when people know too much, it is time for them to die."

Jack Spencer laughed bitterly. "Time to die! Brandt, you're right about me. I do know too much. For instance, I'm sure that either Leeds, Tannen or Armando is a spy. A Nazi agent on his way to the United States. What I can't get through my head is why on earth you want them murdered? After all, the one who is a spy is also a Nazi."

Brandt blanched when Spencer admitted his knowledge of a spy's presence on the train. For a moment it looked as if the Gestapo officer was going to take action. Spencer's hand slid into his side coat pocket and curled around the Luger.

"You are mistaken," Brandt said finally. "Why should we try to send one of our agents to the United States in such a foolish manner when a submarine could deposit him on the coast any time we choose?"

"Ah—you forget, *Herr Brandt*," Spencer reproved, "that I have been in Unoccupied France and able to listen to a short-wave radio. I got all the news from home. Eight of your spies tried that trick. Six are dead—two are in prison. Your espionage outfit in the United States has been crippled by the work of J. Edgar Hoover and his F.B.I. You need a leader there, someone to knit the loose threads together again and make a workable organization out of the remnants. Only a man who could enter the country legally would be able to do that."

"I have no time to talk," Brandt snapped. "It is enough that the girl will be spared only if you now kill Tannen and then yourself."

Jack Spencer took one of Armando's cigarettes from his pocket, lighted it and crossed his legs. Through a window behind Brandt, he could see that the train was moving at a terrific rate.

Brandt ordered him out, harshly. Spencer grinned and blew a mouthful of smoke into the Gestapo man's face. For half an hour he sat there while Brandt fumed. To all of the Nazi's threats, he had only one answer.

"My time limit isn't up yet and if I choose to stay here, that's my business. Kick me out and I'll yell the whole story all over the train. You know, Brandt, I don't think you like this spy—whoever he may be. I think you want him murdered because you may then take his place."

"Why should I ask for such a perilous job?" Brandt snarled.

"Ah," Spencer chuckled, "then it is true. Why, Brandt? Because the United States is a pretty good place. Even with its rubber and gas rationing, a little less meat perhaps, a few privations, but if that rationing was cut in half we'd still live ten times better than any Nazi, and fifty times better than those poor devils you conquered. Good heavens, man, ask me something difficult to answer."

Brandt arose menacingly. "You will go or I shall have you executed where you sit. Is that quite clear?"

SPENCER knew the game was over. He got up and sauntered in the direction of the baggage car. While he had been seated there, taunting Brandt, his mind had been extremely busy. First, with the idea that Valerie had been snatched from beneath Leeds' nose. That was impossible. She would have put up a terrific fuss. Therefore, she went willingly and Leeds knew why and where she was going.

Spencer tried to puzzle out just where Brandt could have hidden the girl. After all, hiding places on a speeding train are few. Wherever she was, that place must be thought secure by its simple obviousness.

Spencer walked across the baggage car. One Gestapo man was on duty there, eyeing him ominously. The big, coffinlike crate was standing on end once more. Spencer's eyes sparkled. He turned suddenly and threw himself at the Nazi guard.

This act was accomplished so fast the German didn't even have time to cry out an alarm. Spencer got the man's neck in a viselike grip, shoved a knee into his back and pulled him over. Gradually, the Nazi's face turned bluish. His struggles ceased and he slid limply to the floor when Jack Spencer let him go.

The American hurried to the big crate, tipped it over, and this time it wasn't quite so heavy. He found the same screw driver and set to work. When the lid came free, he saw Valerie inside, tied and gagged. Her eyes pleaded with him. Spencer leaned close and whispered:

"I don't know but I ought to let you stay there, darling. You got me into an awful mess."

She wagged her head energetically. He took out a knife, cut her loose, and she swayed a bit after he stood her up.

"Jack"—she wetted her lips between words—"I went for a walk and they seized me. I was rolled into a big blanket and two Gestapo men carried me right through the train. Nobody paid any attention."

"People being repatriated don't usually observe things too closely, Val," he said grimly. "They are more concerned with minding their own business and getting out of this Dark Age continent. I have no time for explanations now. How are you at riding the top of a train moving plenty of miles an hour?"

"I'll do anything if it means those—those beasts won't get me again, Jack!" she declared.

"Then come forward quickly. We'll open one of the platform doors between this baggage car and Brandt's private car. Nobody can see us there. Come on."

He got the door open, whispered instructions in Valerie's ear and gave her a boost up. She seized some projection on the roof of the car and he saw two lovely, silken-clad legs hurriedly vanish from sight. He closed the door, replaced the seal as well as he could and started walking toward the rear of the train. His plan was working out.

When he pushed open the door of the car to which he and his party had been assigned, he saw Tannen suddenly start moving back. Tannen held up both hands as if he hoped they would shield him from a bullet.

"No!" he half-screamed. "Jack, you can't do it. Jack—don't! I'm your friend. Don't kill me!"

Spencer kept on going, features impassive, steps almost robotlike in their steady advance. Suddenly Tannen changed his tactics and charged straight at the American. His frenzy lent him strength and speed. He brushed past Spencer and began running madly. The chase began.

Spencer went after him. Tannen kept yelling that he was to be murdered, but the passengers either decided this was some new form of entertainment or they trusted Jack Spencer enough to know that Tannen must have gone stark mad. At least, no one made any attempt to hinder the consular clerk's progress.

When he reached the baggage car

door and opened it, he was Tannen crouched in a corner, shivering with terror. Slowly Spencer drew the Luger from his pocket. With the same motion he glanced at his wrist-watch. By the planned speed of this train they should be streaking across a corner of neutral territory within twenty minutes now. Then there would be a stop at a neutral railroad station where the passengers would be transferred to another train. That was why Brandt had given him a time limit.

Jack Spencer saw that the Gestapo guard had been removed. He calmly locked the door behind him, kept his gun trained on Tannen and walked to the other door. He locked this one also.

Turning slowly, he leveled the Luger. His finger squeezed trigger. The gun

slug wouldn't harm you. Brandt loaded the gun to capacity, with real bullets. Like this one."

The gun blazed. Tannen shrieked a curse and plunged headlong toward Spencer. Instead of a bullet he met a hard fist that rocked him back on his heels. Then Spencer closed and punched until Tannen howled for mercy. He talked—mostly about the way Brandt had doublecrossed him. He swore a terrible vengeance, promising that both Spencer and Valerie should go free.

Then Tannen got to his feet. The train had stopped and he knew it. Brandt had not put in an appearance yet. He could not figure things out until the side doors of the baggage car slid back.

Four men, armed with tommy guns, jumped in. They were dressed in dark



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COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE

bucked. Tannen gave a jerk and a howl of astonishment. Three or four inches to the left of his head was a small bullet-hole through the side of the car.

Spencer fired again and then twice more. Each time he came reasonably close, but managed to miss. Tannen's terror now became something to behold. He was waving his hands and trying to talk at the same time, but his throat had become too parched. Only unintelligible croaks came out.

Spencer kept the gun trained on him. "Brandt isn't coming—did you notice that, Tannen?" he asked. "Brandt wants you killed. He's smart. If I kill you, his responsibility is gone. Both to the Reich and to the United States. He'll simply tell your superiors I got out of hand and tell United States officials that I went stark, raving mad. You thought the second bullet in the gun would either be a blank or have so little powder that the

civilian clothes. Behind them came Don Leeds, similarly armed. Jack Spencer dropped the Luger he held and stood aside. Tannen was tied up and swung like a sack of potatoes out the door. A moment later, a car motor started up.

"Brandt has been taken care of." Leeds grinned at Spencer. "I suppose you still can't imagine what we're up to."

"Oh, yes, I can," Spencer said. "You've just taken Tannen right out of my hands. He's the spy who was planted among us. You're another, Leeds, with one big difference. He is Nazi and you—are British. I knew this when I checked your passports. Tannen's was impressed with a stolen U. S. Government seal which was in Brandt's office at Meisdon. I impressed a blank piece of paper with that seal and kept the impression. Most of those seals have little peculiarities, like the print of a typewriter. Tannen's

passport was faked and that seal used on it."

LEEDS chuckled. "I had an idea you were wise," he said, "and I thought you were about ready to get rough so I decided it was time to start things humming. I got past you, all right, reached the top of the train and made my way to the engine. I stuck up the crew and made them really shovel on the coal. We're two miles from a neutral border. The area is deserted and we, as British subjects, are within our rights to attack this train."

"Nobody said you weren't," Jack Spencer told him. "It had to be Tannen, of course. Ed Fraser was murdered in that lion's house because he knew Tannen and would expose the man who was posing as Tannen. Armando died because he was too suspicious. Tannen believed that Armando was wise to him when really Armando was just trying to find out why you were posing as Don Leeds. You're not Leeds, of course."

"My name is Kincaid." The British agent nodded. "Oh, yes—Valerie is on her way to this car now. I left her to handle the train crew while I came back and pulverized Brandt. She's a British agent also. The two of us have been after von Graum—our mutual friend who took Tannen's identity—for weeks. He operated in London for a time and murdered two people there. We wanted him for that and we got him, even though we had practically to snatch him from the grasp of our ally. Thanks, Jack, you were helpful."

"Don't kid yourself," Jack Spencer said. "I was only helping myself. Brandt had me on a spot. I was supposed to kill you. They suspected you, of course. You

arranged that for me nicely, by climbing to the top of the train. Tannen—or whatever his name is—really believed I had shot you. I let him think so, too—I let him hear me report the fact to Brandt. Then I went after Tannen."

"I heard the shots, Jack. Couldn't make up my mind if you really were finishing him off."

"Brandt gave me a prepared gun. The bullet meant for you would have done the job. The second—for Tannen—wouldn't even have wounded him. What neither of them knew was that I'd swiped another Luger and hidden it here in the baggage car. I switched guns, fired at Tannen and made him think Brandt was doublecrossing him. Tannen promptly confessed. Leeds—or Kincaid—who was that man they murdered in the hotel lobby?"

"One of our chaps," the British agent said. "He discovered who the spy was and came to tell us. Just prior to that, they'd arrested Valerie. It was pure luck that you came along and got her out of it."

Jack Spencer swung out of the side door and dropped to the ground.

"This is going to create an awful smell in the State Department," he said, "but we'll iron it out. I'm going forward and see what's delaying Valerie."

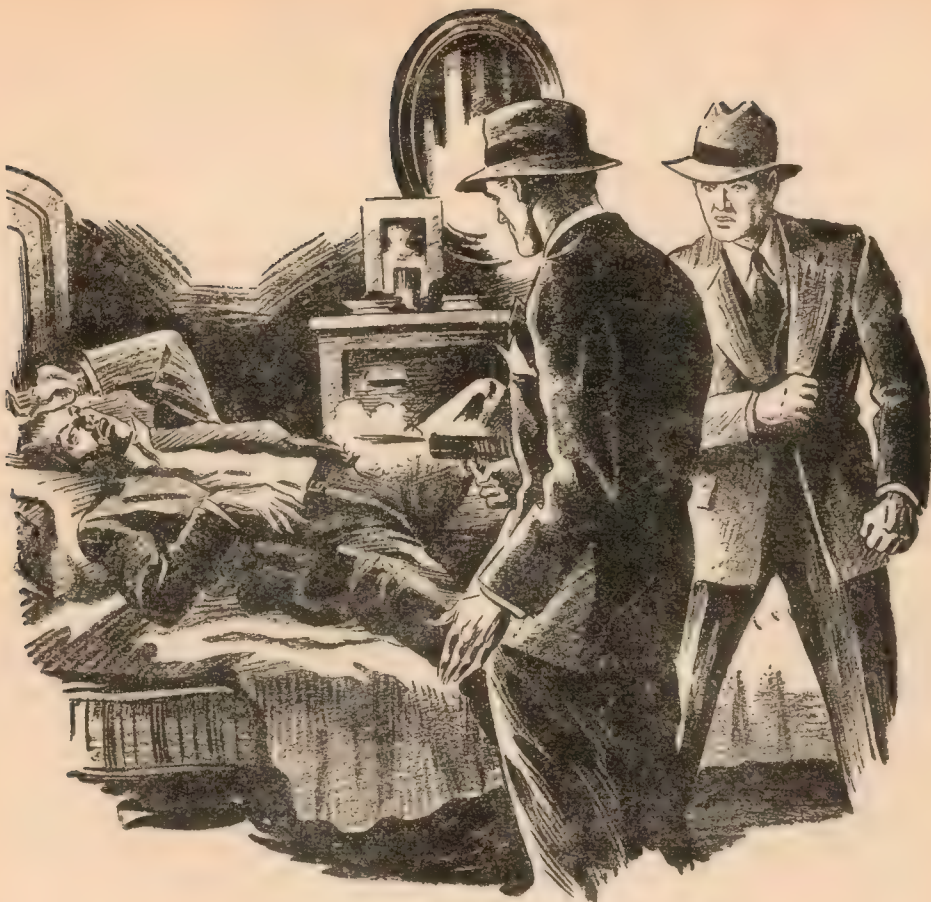
"Good luck," the British agent called out. "If you don't mind, we'll let her continue the trip on Anita Clark's passport. Safer that way. She can come back from America by plane."

"If I don't mind?" Spencer shouted. "Brother, I was going to insist on the same thing. When you promise to commit two murders and then suicide for the sake of a girl, you really want to know her better."

NEW SUCCESS OVER ATHLETE'S FOOT

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The newcomer fired and the mobster collapsed on the bed

I'LL TALK ABOUT YOU

By **SAM MERWIN, JR.**

Death isn't far away when a radio news commentator tells the world he knows a killer!

TONY BARRON walked out of his apartment house into a murder. To most people, this may not sound remarkable. New York, to them, is the Babylon of which O'Henry and MacIntyre and Winchell have written in lurid terms—a city of grifters and racketeers

and fast women in which anything can happen and usually does.

Though records may appear to bear them out, they forget the immense size of the place. Nine-tenths of the resident population live thoroughly humdrum lives, patronize their neighborhood movies and live their life

spans entirely unaware of the turgid sea of violence that makes outlanders shudder deliciously.

Tony Barron was no stranger to violence. In his years as a foreign correspondent, he'd covered wars and riots all over the world. He'd even been torpedoed once, in the tropics. While there, he had picked up a package of malaria that had kept him out of the armed forces in the present crisis.

But as a native New Yorker and, latterly, as a radio news commentator, he had not expected to meet it on his well-policed doorstep. New York City was his home, his native town. Naturally, he felt safe there.

He was enroute to the studio, playing mental handball with the usual worries about his broadcast material and the reactions of Fred Flanders, the candy maker who was his sponsor, when he stepped onto the sidewalk. As such, he was only half aware of the stocky man in the gray suit who emerged from a cab and hurried toward him.

Even the sound of the shot sounded at first like the inevitable automobile backfire. But to a man who has been under gunfire, the crack of a pistol has a vicious unmistakable something, and he snapped abruptly out of his reverie.

The stocky man kept right on walking for a full five more steps. He opened his mouth as if he were going to say something. But instead of words, a whinny came out—a high, rasping abrupt sound that went into a glissando and faded to a moan. With which he fell forward on his face and lay there on the sidewalk, twitching. There was a widening crimson splotch on his back.

A cab started quickly, picked up speed with a roar. As it came by, Tony recorded it photographically in his trained journalist's mind. The driver was a thin, hook-nosed type whose beetling black brows showed briefly under the brim of his hat.

In the back seat, well concealed by shadows, sat another, larger man, engaged in stuffing something under his coat. Tony caught a flash of a round, smooth-shaven jowl and a pair of flashing eyes that drilled him from under a snap-brimmed fedora.

Then Tony was writing down the cab number on a piece of copy paper as the car took the corner on two wheels. The doorman came racing up, his eyes goggling. He wet his nervous lips with his tongue.

"Shall I get the doctor?" he asked foolishly. Tony shook his head. "Get the police," he said. "This man's dead. Here's the number of the cab the murder was committed from."

He walked the few feet to the cab from which the victim had emerged. Its driver was still sitting there as if he'd been turned to stone. But Tony's first question restored him to life.

"Geez, I don't know nothin'," he said. "This lug picks me up over in Times Square and tells me to come here. Then he tells me to wait. He slips me twelve bits, so it's okay. Then he gets out in a hurry and—bing. He's done to a turn."

THE police arrived then and took over. The dead man was identified by papers found on his body as one Martin Keck. Which meant nothing to Tony, or, apparently, to anyone else present. Tony identified himself, told his story and was permitted to go ahead to his broadcast.

Dick von Traube, the slick-voiced announcer, and Fred Flanders, the sponsor were there ahead of him in the office, waiting for him to give the script a final going over in view of the latest war bulletins in over the wires.

"You're late," said Flanders.

He was a trimly solid man of early middle age whose barbering and manicure exuded success and whose faultlessly tailored suit left no doubt of its cost. Tony shrugged, explained the cause of his delay.

"You mean this poor devil was slaughtered at your feet?" von Traube asked incredulously. "Are you okay for the broadcast?"

"Sure," said Tony, though he felt hollow and jittery inside. "Remember, I've seen a lot of violent death. My one interest in a case like this lies in catching the killer."

"You'd better leave it alone, Tony," said Flanders mildly. "You're worth far too much to us to go around playing detective."

"I'll remember that at option time," said Tony. "Now let's see—we'd better get about two more paragraphs on the North Atlantic struggle. We've been top-heavy on Australia the last few weeks."

So, in routine fashion, they sweated it out. When Tony's mind wandered as he paused to light a cigarette or pour himself a glass of water, he had an annoying tendency to see that poor fellow fall to the sidewalk, but he managed to push the murder to a back pigeon-hole in his well-ordered mind. After all, it was police business, and he was no police-news commentator.

It was during the broadcast itself that he began to feel a sense of personal outrage. Come to think of it, he might have been shot himself.

People had no right to go around killing people on *his* doorstep. He, who had braved bombs and shellfire in a dozen war-torn countries, felt afraid — but more annoyed than afraid. Such things didn't happen to him—in New York.

And then—he must have hurried the broadcast in his few moments of aberration—he saw the engineer making frantic signals through his window. A quick glance at the studio clock told him the worst. He was a full minute ahead of schedule.

"In conclusion," he said, the paragraphs falling into place as he talked, "let me state authoritatively that if it is any reassurance to my listeners in these trying times, the Axis powers

are not the only gangsters in the world.

"On my way to the studio this evening, a man was shot down at my feet on the sidewalk. He was shot in the back as ruthlessly and mercilessly and lawlessly as any victim of Hitler or Hirohito.

"His killer got away in a car apparently driven by an accomplice. This driver was a lean, evil, beetle-browed young man with a thin hook nose. The gunman, a heavier type, was also smooth-shaven. Their cab, a Lavender, bore the number CT3446. If anyone saw this vehicle in the upper East Side between the hours of five and six this evening, will he please report it to the police? These men must be caught. Good-night."

THE broadcast came to its conclusion with a commercial extolling the wonders of Flanders' Candies in Dick von Traube's mellifluous tones. Off the air, he turned to Tony, shaking his head and mopping his pompadoured brow.

"What got into you?" he asked.

"I don't know," said Tony. "I was so mad about it, I hurried the broadcast and used it for filler. So what? It's news."

"You ain't Winchell," said Dick. Flanders came hurrying in, scowling, shot questions on the same tack.

"I thought maybe I'd help catch them," said Tony. "But I guess I didn't have much to say. Let's skip it."

"I hope you can," said Flanders. "Killers don't like witnesses. And I want you on the air for me, not in the East River."

A page-boy came into the studio, carrying a note for Tony. He opened it, saw that it announced a telephone call. Shrugging, he picked up the phone beside the microphone.

"Barron?" said a deep voice with an oddly flat tone.

"Speaking," said Tony.

"Brother," said the voice with

ironic sympathy, "did you know that you were asking for trouble just now on the air when you talked about what you thought you saw? You wouldn't want that, would you?"

"I'm no brother of yours," snapped Tony, motioning for one of the others to get busy tracing the call.

"You're tellin' me!" said the voice. "If you was my brother, you wouldn't have sounded off. Don't do it again, unless you want the same medicine Keck got. Get that!"

The phone clicked off. Tony turned to von Traube, who was on another instrument. But a sudden rush of fan calls to the switchboard had made tracing impossible. Flanders, who had sunk into a chair, listening to his account, leaned forward, stabbing the air with his forefinger, his voice hoarse with excitement.

"I told you so!" he said. "Tony, do what the man says. Let the police handle it. They can protect themselves."

"Implying that I can't?" said Tony mildly.

He was so angry he didn't dare raise his voice. He felt thoroughly pushed around, and he didn't like it. The call had been all he'd needed.

With a curt good-night to his sponsor and announcer, he stomped out of the studio. The idea of being muzzled by a mob of cheap hoodlums who solved their problems with guns infuriated him.

He went directly back to his apartment, wishing to be alone for awhile to get over his anger and decide what to do. But at the desk, the clerk informed him a young lady was waiting to see him in the downstairs foyer.

He turned and saw a brown-haired girl whose dark eyes had been recently enlarged by tears. She had firm smooth skin, a nice figure and features.

"I'm Tony Barron," he told her curtly. "Is there anything I can do for you, Miss—"

"Keck," she said. "Marta Keck.

Martin—the man who was killed—was my brother. I'd like to talk to you—alone."

"Come on upstairs," he said. "I think the occasion warrants breaking a convention nobody keeps anymore."

HE LED the way to the elevator, rode with her in silence till they were in his square living room that overlooked the river. He offered her a drink, which was gratefully accepted, waited for her to begin.

"Did you mean what you said over the air, Mr. Barron?" she asked. "That you wanted to catch Martin's murderers?"

"I did," he said, lighting a cigarette. "Why?"

"Mr. Barron, my brother was on his way to see you when he was killed. I'm convinced that he was killed *because* he came to see you."

"For heaven's sake, why?" said Tony, startled.

She hesitated, began her story, picking her words carefully. Considering what she'd been through that evening, she was in fine control of herself.

She was, it seemed, a secretary-receptionist for a major midtown insurance firm. Her brother had worked for the same firm as an investigator and adjuster. They had lived together in a comfortable if unfashionable Greenwich Village apartment.

"It all started when Pietro—he runs the magazine and tobacco store on our corner—came to him, crying. He was taking a beating from racketeers and didn't dare go to the police. He thought perhaps Martin could do something for him."

"Not an uncommon yarn, I fear," said Tony quietly.

"I know that," she said. "So did Martin. After all, you can't be an insurance investigator for ten years and stay naïve. But we liked Pietro and Martin wanted to do what he could. Then he found out that other little stores, all over the city, were

getting the same attention from these fellows.

"Martin began to make it a point to drop into these little shops and ask. He could tell even when they wouldn't talk. He said silence told him as much as a statement. Getting proof was something else. These people were all afraid to talk.

"But Martin knew his stuff. I don't know how he did it, but he began to make charts of some kind. And then, last night, he told me he thought he had something. And he decided to pay you a visit and enlist your aid. Those were his exact words."

"You couldn't tell me why he selected me?" Tony asked curiously. "Police crimes aren't my usual line."

"I can't," she said quietly.

There was a quiet forthrightness about her that drew him to her, made him want to help her. She fumbled with her handbag, pulled out a well-filled manila envelope.

"But here are the charts. I thought perhaps they might mean something

to you. He was studying them last night when he decided to come to see you."

Tony took the envelope from her, gave its contents a cursory examination. Some eighty store addresses were listed, below each of them were the names of various products. Evidently these products were sold by the stores. They included gums, candies, razor blades, toys, types of soft drinks.

Most of the stores, he noticed, were clustered in the village or in the region of the insurance company employing the Kecks. He didn't make much of it. After further talk with the girl, he asked if he could take her home. She thanked him, and he rode her downtown in a taxicab.

"May I have your phone number?" he asked at her door. "Don't get me wrong. But I want to keep in touch."

MARTA smiled and scribbled it for him on a piece of paper. He

[Turn page]

WHY GOD PERMITS WAR!

Why does God permit war? Why does He permit cruelty, injustice, pain, starvation, sickness and death?

Thirty years ago, in Forbidden Tibet, behind the highest mountains in the world, a young Englishman named Edwin J. Dingle found the answers to these questions. A great mystic opened his eyes. A great change came over him. He realized the strange Power that Knowledge gives.

That Power, he says, can transform the life of anyone. Questions, whatever they are, can be answered. The problems of health, death, poverty and wrong, can be solved.

In his own case, he was brought back to splendid health. He acquired wealth, too, as well as world-wide professional recognition. Thirty years ago, he was sick as a man could be and live. Once his coffin was bought. Years of almost continuous tropical fevers, broken bones, near blindness, privation and danger had made a human wreck of him, physically and mentally.

He was about to be sent back to England to die, when a strange message came—"They are waiting for you in Tibet." He wants to tell the whole world what he learned there, under the

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As a first step in their progress toward the Power that Knowledge gives, Mr. Dingle wants to send the readers of this notice a 9,000-word treatise. It is free. For your free copy, send your name and address to the Institute of Mentalphysics, 213 South Hobart Blvd., Dept. F-337, Los Angeles, Calif. Write promptly.

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wondered why he'd bothered to explain himself, decided he must have been kidding himself as to his intentions. The girl had a quality, a fineness that made him remind himself of the task he'd agreed to undertake for her. It was no time for romance—or was it?

Then he rode on down to Police Headquarters, where a few minutes sufficed to have him shown a file of photographs of all gangsters with records and bushy brows. The lieutenant in charge of the case seemed more than glad to oblige.

"It isn't often," he said, "that a man as busy as you are, Mr. Barron, cooperates so fully with us on a case that doesn't concern him. You know, of course, that it involves a certain amount of risk. If you want us to detail a man—"

"You need your men with this war on," said Tony.

He didn't want a police shadow. The case, already a personal affair to him, had become trebly so with the threatening phone call and the revelation by Marta Keck that her brother had been en route to see him when he was shot down in cold blood.

He pretended a fuzziness of memory that was not so. He recalled that driver's face perfectly — he hadn't been a crack journalist for nothing—but he had sound foundation for feeling he was up against a well-organized gang. If this were so, and the police descended on one of its lesser members, the fellow would be either shipped out of town or eliminated entirely.

The twenty-sixth photograph he looked at was the one he was seeking. But he kept right on to the end of the stack. Then he went through it again, setting a half dozen aside. Feigning doubt, he asked and got the names of all these men, managed to learn their hideouts as known to police.

"We'll pull 'em all in for you," said the lieutenant grimly.

"I wouldn't do that," said Tony.

"After all, I got the barest kind of a look. I wouldn't like to blacken the name of some innocent chap on my poor memory."

"I wouldn't worry about any of these fellows," said the lieutenant, his chin moving forward. But Tony sighed.

"I wish I were surer," he said.

Feeling fairly certain that he'd deferred any immediate mass dragnet, he left, took his way back uptown. His face was set tautly as he sat in the back of a cab.

Ike Morrell was the man who had driven the murder vehicle. He had a record of pickpocketing, stealing cars and other lesser gang activities. Now on parole, he lived in a furnished room far over on East Tenth Street, near Avenue B.

Tony let his cab go at Astor Place, walked toward the address. The streets were dark, and the life with which they teemed in daylight and the earlier evening had faded. His destination was a bulge-breasted shabby slum tenement house whose scrap-littered facade was further defaced by rusty twin fire-escapes.

The door was unlocked, and a dim light glowed in the dirty, shabby hall. Moving quietly, Tony got the lettering of the apartments straight, located Ike Morrell's room on the third floor front thanks to a tarnished brass plate for residents' names and room numbers by the front door. He thanked the parole system mentally.

He heard noises of battle or revelry or both coming from several apartments, then made his way back to the sidewalk. There he surveyed the street, made sure no one was coming and scrambled up the rough stone front of the building until he could clamber aboard the left-hand fire-escape.

HE MADE the third-floor hallway without rousing a hue and cry, paused a moment in its sheltering darkness to mop his brow. The full

flavor of the odorous tenement curled his nostrils. Then he proceeded directly to Ike Morrell's door, knocked softly.

"Who's there?" asked a nasal voice.

Tony didn't answer, but kept on knocking softly. Finally, after considerable unabashed swearing, the door was opened a notch, and a bushy brow appeared.

Tony went crashing in, pushed the suddenly terrified mobster back onto an unmade bed with the force of his charge. Moving quickly, he went back and shut the door. When he turned back to the gangster, who was taller than his thinness had suggested, the latter was fumbling in his pocket.

The commentator hit him full on the chin while his right hand was thus occupied. Morrell went spinning backward onto the bed again, bleating with terror. Then Tony was on top of him, wrestling his gun away. That matter attended to, the radio man sat down in a rickety wooden armchair, lit a cigarette.

"Okay, Ike," he said quietly. "Let's talk."

[Turn page]

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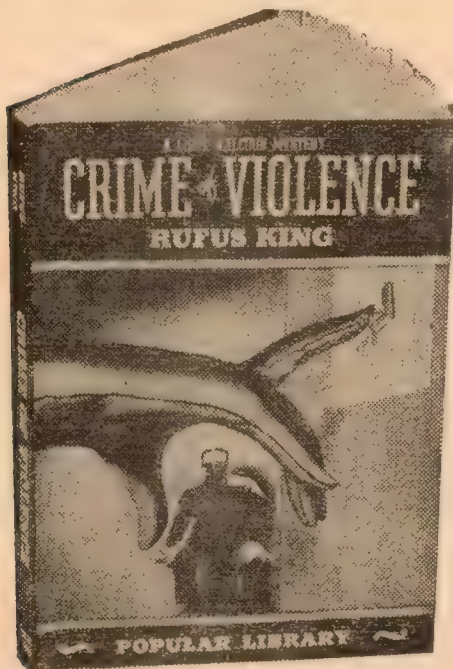
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"How'd you get here? Who are you?" the gangster asked.

"You know who I am," said Tony. "Just to relieve your memory, I'm Tony Barron. I saw you driving away from the scene of Martin Keck's murder a few hours ago."

"I was a mile away. I got friends to prove it," said Ike.

"I don't doubt it," said Tony, balancing the gun on the palm of his hand. "But remember this, Ike—I saw you. I have nothing against you, no reason to want to do you harm. So I'm going to pack a lot more weight with a jury than any hoodlum perjurers you can get together to clear you of being an accomplice to murder."

"You're nuts," said Ike. "I could have you pinched for breaking in here and assaulting me with a deadly weapon."

"Why don't you do that?" said Tony. "I'm sure the police would be glad to know that you, a man on parole, are packing a gun. Or don't you think the fact would matter?"

"You talk too much, spieler," said Ike sullenly, but he was licked. It was in his eyes, in the sag of his shoulders. "What do you want, anyway? I ain't done nothin' to you."

"I want to know why Keck was killed," said Tony, flicking ashes on the threadbare remains of a throw rug. "And I want to know who did the shooting. It won't be like giving it to the police, but if I tell them later, it may help you soften the rap."

"Mister," said the mobster nervously, "if I told you that, I'd take a rap that no one could beat. And it wouldn't be from the police either. So it's nothin' doin'."

"I remember a fellow named Dixie Davis," said Tony. "He did a lot of talking and living if I remember."

"I ain't no Davis," said Ike. "And you ain't no Dewey. And my boss ain't no Luciano. He's tougher."

"You'll talk," said Tony, rising and slipping the gun into his hip pocket. "I'm going to make you."

There was cold fire in the commentator's eyes as he advanced on Ike Morrell, who cringed on the bed, his eyes little pools of fright beneath their bushy brows.

The mobster and his code of gang ethics represented everything Tony instinctively hated. He reached a powerful hand out and yanked Morrell to his feet.

Then he slugged his thin opponent with a crashing backhand wallop, and Morrell collapsed on the bed, moaning. Tony moved forward to lift him again. Then he paused. Had he heard a noise outside?

THE door was flung open. The fear on the face of the man on the bed grew pitiable. His mouth opened wide, and he lifted a hand as if to shield his wizened face.

"No, Tap!" he screamed.

In the same instant, the newcomer triggered his automatic at the frantic Morrell, and the mobster col-

[Turn page]

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lapsed on the crumpled bed. Tony, swinging to face this new element, got a glimpse of the jewels and piercing eyes he'd seen in the back seat of the cab from which the bullet that killed Martin Keck had come.

Then a pile-driving punch knocked the wind out of him, made him as weak as a puppy. He brought up a feeble right, saw through swimming eyes that "Tap" had discarded his pistol and was using both fists against him. He saw lightning as one of them jolted against his chin. Then came two more flashes in quick succession.

Then came the darkness.

When the curtain lifted, he was lying on his own bed, fully clothed and with a terrific headache. The pain was so bad, it took him a good five minutes before he was able to get to the bathroom and give himself a cold water and aspirin treatment.

Outside, it was still dark, but the first gray of dawn showed over the low rooftops of Queens. He sat down on his bed, trying not to wince, and lit a cigarette. He had a lot to remember.

Slowly, it came back to him. The girl, Marta Keck, had visited him and spurred him to immediate action to find her brother's killer. He'd taken her home, gone to Headquarters, spotted Ike Morrell who'd driven the cab, and paid him a call.

The killer, Tap, he decided must have picked up his trail somewhere. Probably he'd been watched from the time he left the broadcast studio.

It was not a pleasant thought. These fellows were more expert than the Gestapo agents who had tailed him around Germany in the half-forgotten days of the "phony" war.

Later, he supposed, Tap and a helper had brought him home, smuggling him past the doorman.

Gradually, he felt better, and with this return to something like normalcy, he found himself faced with two baffling questions. First, why had Keck come to see him? Second,

why had his life been spared? Tap had had him at his mercy.

His prominence as a broadcaster or the fear that he might have told too much to the police could have caused the sparing of his life. Both factors might have figured. But as to why Tap's first victim had come to see him—any answer eluded him.

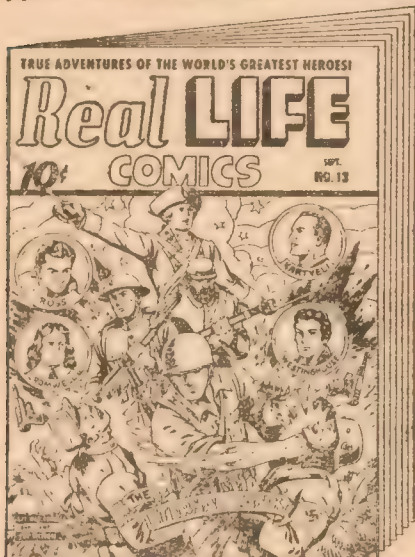
He went to his kitchenette, poured himself a glass of milk and made a sandwich. Then he went to the living room where he'd left the envelope the girl had given him, took it to his desk. The answer, if it hadn't died with its bearer, had to be there.

First he went over the locations of the stores, trying to make something of it. He had a map of Manhattan, and marked each spot on it. But all this showed was the location of the stores Martin Keck had visited. It didn't prove anything to Tony.

He began aimlessly on the lists of wares. All the usual commercial brands of such items appeared to recur on all of them. He even found Flanders' Candies there frequently. Well, at least his sponsor had good

[Turn page]

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distribution. Perhaps he, in his small way, helped to keep a few of those bars moving.

THEN he noticed something else. Here and there, in the case of every other product, were gaps—stores that didn't carry it. But Flanders Candies seemed to be universally popular. They were carried one hundred per cent by every one of the small merchants.

He lit a cigarette, sat down and tried to figure it out. It did seem a bit odd that the Flanders product should be the only one. Coupled with the fact that Keck had been killed when he'd tried to visit Tony, with the fact that he'd made such an attempt, it was a bit more than odd. Tony scowled and blew a smoke ring.

He thought over what he knew about his sponsor and his product, decided it wasn't much. The candy, a locally made and distributed product, was selling like hot cakes, and was, according to Flanders himself, almost ready to branch into national advertising and distribution—which would be a big lift for one Tony Barron.

He went back to his kitchen. A stack of cartons containing Flanders Candies stood in a corner. Tony had never tasted the bar which paid his salary. He ripped open the top carton, took out a bar and unwrapped it, took a bite.

He made a wry face, laid it down on the sink. It had the cheap musty taste of all inferior candies. Its chocolate exterior was thin and bitter, its interior a marshmallow and syrup dilution with a lean layer of gelatin colored pink.

The sun was up now. Shaking his sore head, Tony went back to the living room, tried to decide what to do. If he were right and could prove it, he'd be all kinds of a fool to go through with it.

But something within him told him he wasn't going to be able to back out. He thought of Keck dying, of the girl, even of Ike Morrell shot dead while

sprawled helplessly on his cot.

One way would be to go to the police and have them nab the actual killer. Since he knew the man was called Tap, that should be easy. But that wouldn't bust the racket or get the man behind Tap. There was another way of going about it. And this method, if it worked, would remove all possible doubt of his being wrong.

Tony decided not to spruce up or change his rumpled clothes. He wouldn't be so easy to spot while wearing them. Then he took a cab further uptown, told the man to wait for him when he got out in front of a drug store.

He went into a phone booth, put in a nickel, dialed a number and put his handkerchief over the phone. He had to make this good. He heard a click as the phone at the other end was lifted. This was it.

"Boss," he said, keeping his voice flat in answer to the "Hello" that greeted him. "You know who this is."

"What's the idea of using this phone?" snapped Flanders.

Tony's heart did a double chase as he found his suspicions confirmed.

"I've got to, Boss. Things are getting hot. I got to have ten grand to get out of town quick. That wacky spieler of yours has found out too much. I just got a tip from inside."

"I can't do that," said Flanders angrily. "You know the terms of our agreement."

"You got to, Boss," said Tony, hopping his imitation of Tap would fool his employer for a few seconds more. "I'm at my place, and it's safe for another hour. The cops aren't moving till the day shift comes on. You bring me the money right now or I'll spill."

[Turn page]



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"Blast you!" said Flanders. "I'll send Peters."

"You'll send yourself—alone," said Tony. "I'm not taking chances on a fast shuffle now. And bring cash."

HE HUNG up, found himself sweating, went back to the cab. Through the rear window, he could watch the entrance of Flanders' apartment. He waited restlessly, each minute an hour.

Was his sponsor—and that was a beaut, cutting off his own sponsor—going to do what he'd been told? Or would he call some other hood and have Tap put out of the way?

Just as he had given up hope, a small coupé stopped in front of the marquee, and a garage mechanic got out of it. Flanders, his topcoat flapping with his haste, climbed in and shot hurriedly away. Tony tapped his driver on the shoulder, handed him a five-dollar bill. "Don't lose that fellow," he said. "There's another of these if you don't."

"Take it easy," said the driver, grinning. "He's ours."

Flanders drove downtown, bearing west as he sped through half-deserted avenues and streets. Tony's driver kept in pursuit, stayed just far enough behind to avoid discovery. They wound up in a narrow, slanting Greenwich Village street. The candy manufacturer pulled up in front of a modern apartment building, disappeared within.

Tony paid off his cab, walked over to the coupé, lifted the hood quickly and disconnected four spark-plug wires. Flanders wasn't going to find it easy to make a quick getaway. Then he moved across the street, walked to the first corner, where a drug store stood, went to the phone booth.

He had just finished dialing Headquarters when the door of the booth was pushed open, and he felt the muzzle of a gun shoved into his right side. He turned, looked for the third time into the piercing black eyes of Tap, the killer. His bejeweled face was twisted into a snarl.

"Hang up, sucker!" he said softly. "So you couldn't leave well enough alone. I never thought any guy would cut off his own income for no reason at all."

"There are," said Tony with a calmness he did not feel, "a lot of things a mug like you wouldn't know. I don't like working for a crook. Which wouldn't bother you."

"So what?" said the killer, forcing him out into the street with his gun in a side coat pocket. "It does you a lot of good, doesn't it, my noble friend?"

Flanders was sitting in his coupé, trying vainly to make it start as they walked back toward him. The street was beginning to come to life. If he was in a spot, Tony realized, so were the two racketeers. But he couldn't risk the lives of innocent bystanders.

Flanders got out of the car as they came abreast of it, saw them and got back in. He shot a baleful glance at Tony. The latter walked to him, put a foot on the running-board, rested his elbow on the window. At any moment, he expected a bullet in his back. He managed a quivering grin.

"Hello, Boss," he said in his best imitation of Tap's flat voice. "Having trouble with your motor?"

"Get away from here!" snapped the candy manufacturer, his teeth showing in panic. "You're through, Barron, through!"

"Hey!" Tony shouted loudly to draw the attention of a cluster of young men on their way to work. "This man behind me has a gun in my back. He's going to kill me at the orders of Fred Flanders, sitting in this car. Don't let him—"

It was all he'd hoped for. His move had bewildered the already harassed Tap. Now the audience was assembling. Tap wrenched at his elbow, afraid to shoot him. Tony sweat himself and turned.

He swayed to one side and crouched as he pivoted. Tap's gun went off through his pocket, tearing a burning gash in his side. But Tony came

[Turn page]

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around with his right fist cocked and all the force of his body in back of it. The blow caught the killer full in the throat, and its force sent him staggering backward.

His gun went off again harmlessly, and Tony, coming up on his left side where he couldn't bring it into play, sent a savage one-two to the side of his head. Tap went down, cracking his head on the sidewalk when he couldn't get his right hand clear of his pocket to break his fall.

Then Tony spun to catch Flanders as that worthy scrambled from the street side of the coupé and attempted to flee. But the commentator didn't need to chase him far. Tap's first bullet, after ripping a gash in Tony's side, had passed through the open car window and crashed into the candy manufacturer's chest.

He ran half a block, then fell prone. Police sirens screamed.

"And that's how it happened," Tony told the lieutenant.

His side was stiff and hurt like blazes from iodine. Flanders, suffering from loss of blood and a pair of broken ribs, was in a prison hospital. Taps—whose real name was George Tappan and who was a badly wanted and slippery criminal—was locked up in a cell.

"They must have seen me from an apartment window as I left Flanders' car," Tony concluded. "I imagine they were both upset when they found Tap hadn't made that call. They must have just missed seeing me tamper with the motor."

"All I can say is thanks," said the lieutenant, "on behalf of the department and half the small store-owners in this city. You busted one of the meanest rackets there is. Those poor folks take a profit in pennies, and the racketeer who preys on them is literally depriving them of living expenses. But you've also busted yourself out of a job."

"There should be other offers," said Tony. "But I'm not taking any. Flanders' contract kept me from tak-

ing a complete cure for this malaria I've had the last two years. And the malaria kept me from joining the army. And that's what I'm going to attend to now."

"Good luck," said the lieutenant. "If you can wrap up Japs and Nazis as neatly as you wrapped up these fellows, you'll be a general before it's over. Anything else I can do?"

"Yeah," said Tony, fishing in his pocket for a piece of paper which a young lady had given him the night before. "I'd like the use of your phone."

THE BULLETIN BOARD

(Concluded from page 13)

impossibility, for the "blowback" would blind the user.

Opening doors and desks with a collection of keys. In order to open an ordinary Yale lock it would be necessary to try over a hundred keys as the combinations of a five-tumbler lock and three-rib keys runs into the hundreds.—George Parke, Zephyrhills, Fla.

Our firearms expert says reader Parke is one hundred percent right. A silencer can be used only on a single-shot gun, either pistol or rifle. Otherwise the silencer, which tends to bottle up the gases in the barrel, will jam the mechanism of an automatic, or will blow back through the cylinder of a revolver.

Fair notice is hereby served on all writers and would-be writers—watch your step when Mr. Parke is around.

Here's another reader reaction:

Having two heroes like the Crimson Mask and the Candid Camera Kid appearing on alternate months is driving me nutty. I like the Candid Camera Kid better personally, and I find I have to wait through two issues each time. The Mask is an old-fashioned idea anyway. The camera stuff is fresh and modern and up-to-date. How about more of the Kid and less of the Mask?—Robert Maccham, Jersey City, N. J.

Now there is a lad who pulls no punches and spares no feelings. But Robert, my boy, granted that the Candid Camera Kid is a fascinating personality, a lot of people have written in to tell us how much they like the Crimson Mask and a lot more like both.

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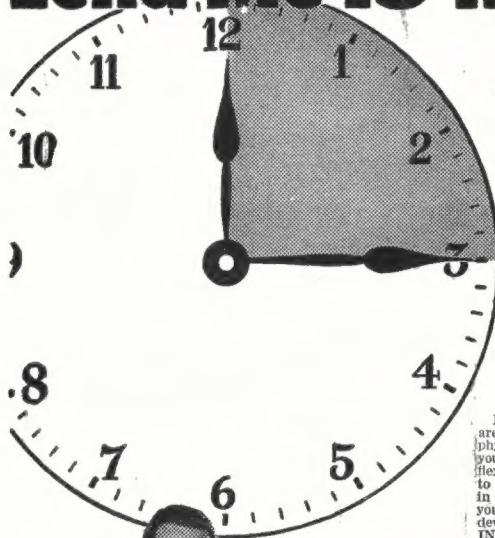
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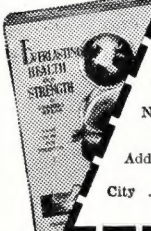
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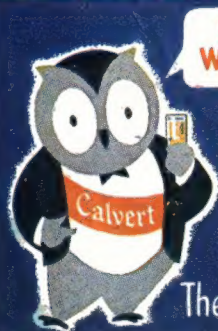
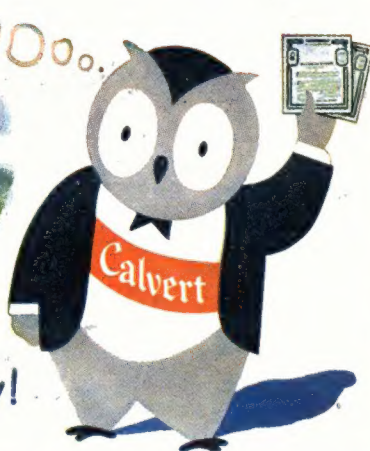


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